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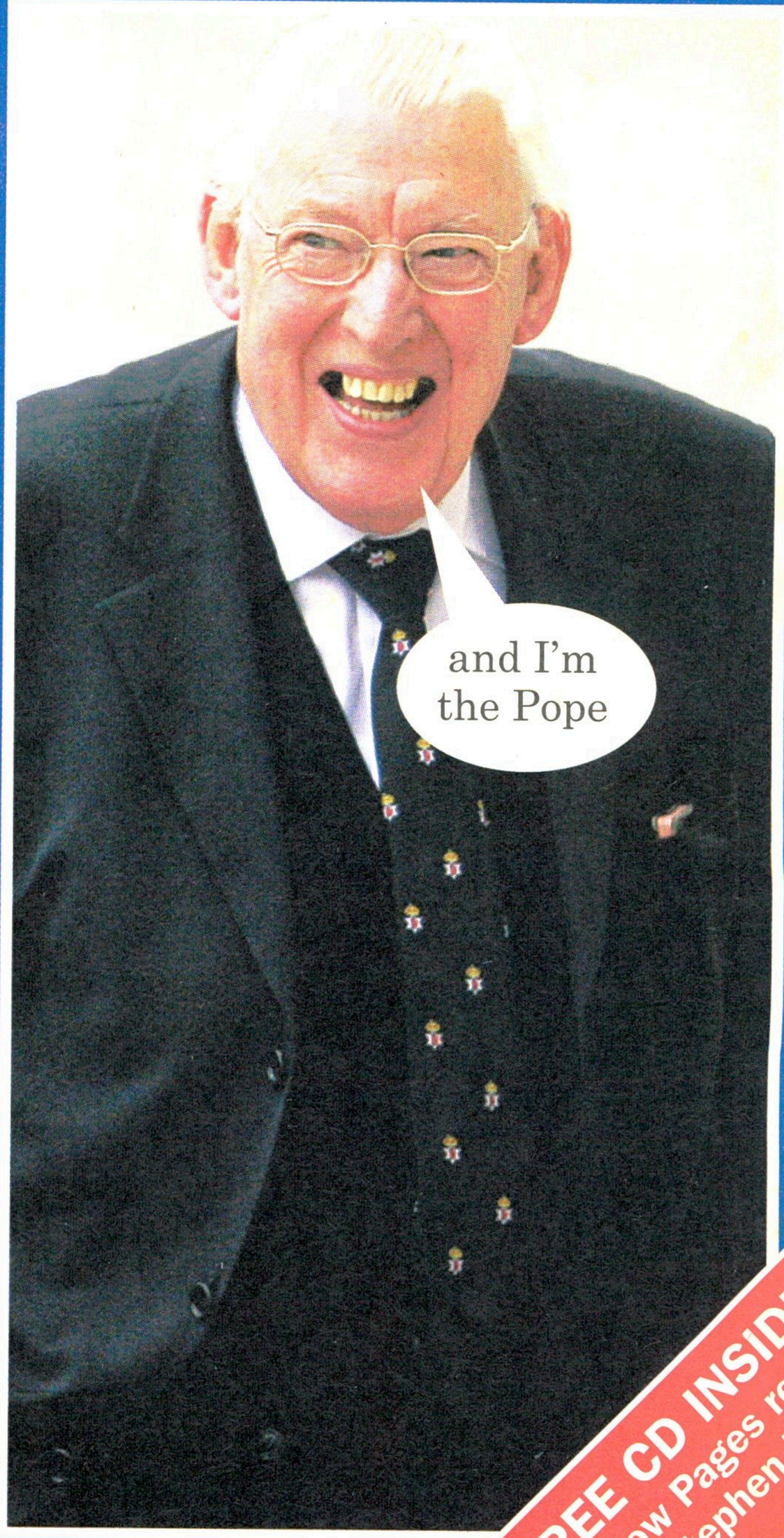

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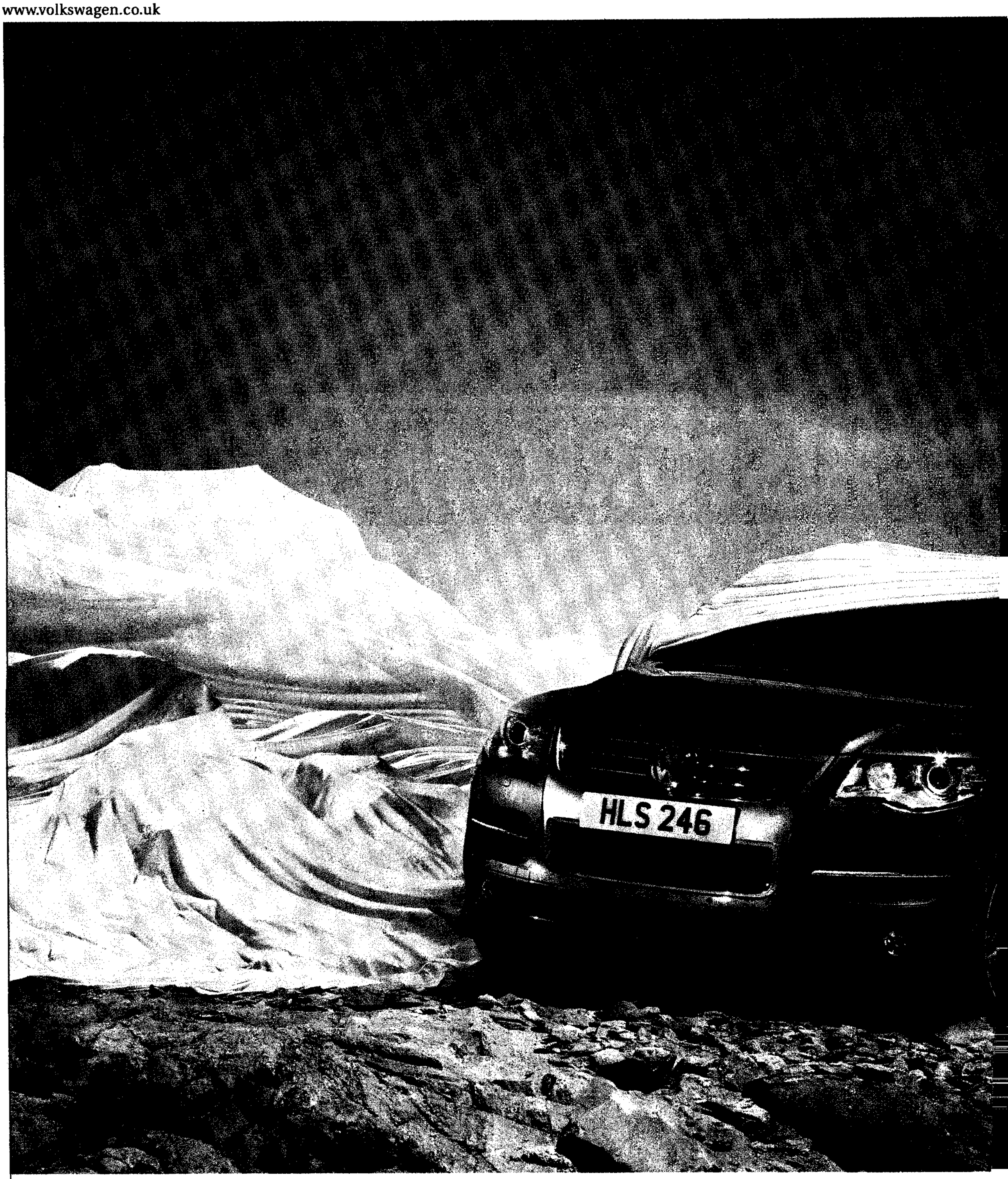

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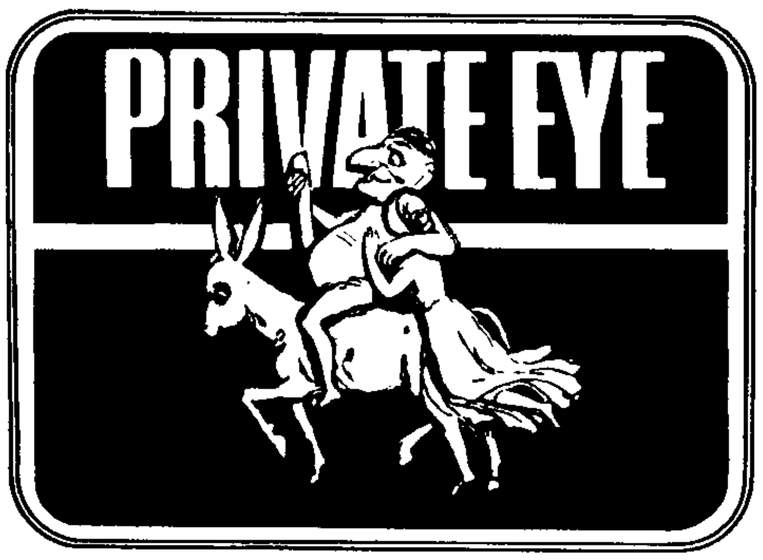

Mine's a McGuinness!

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LABOUR MP John McFall rushed to defend Gordon Brown from Lord Turnbull's outrageous slurs last week. Gordon, he insisted, "is very, very committed to people" and certainly not a Stalinist.

But Turnbull isn't the first person to make the comparison. When Brown was interviewed by the Treasury select committee in July 2002, the committee chairman said many people were worried by his obsession with "central targets" and "a command control structure". "There are so many targets," he told the Chancellor, "that maybe you remind them of Stalin introducing the Gosplan."

The chairman of the select committee, then as now, was John McFall MP.

LEADING figures from Labour, leftish think-tanks and academia issued a warning back in September 2003 about the party's dangerous drift.

Twenty signatories put together a manifesto that launched Compass, a ginger group led by former lobbyist Neal Lawson, in which the authors fretted that public trust in Labour was already declining before the Iraq war. Though New Labour "held out the promise of 'a new politics'" and a break with Tory "sleaze", it had failed to deliver. Instead, "centralism, secrecy and the urge to control remain the hallmarks of political style".

Alas, "the permeation of market values through all parts of society has corroded many of the institutions and the relationships which once bound people together".

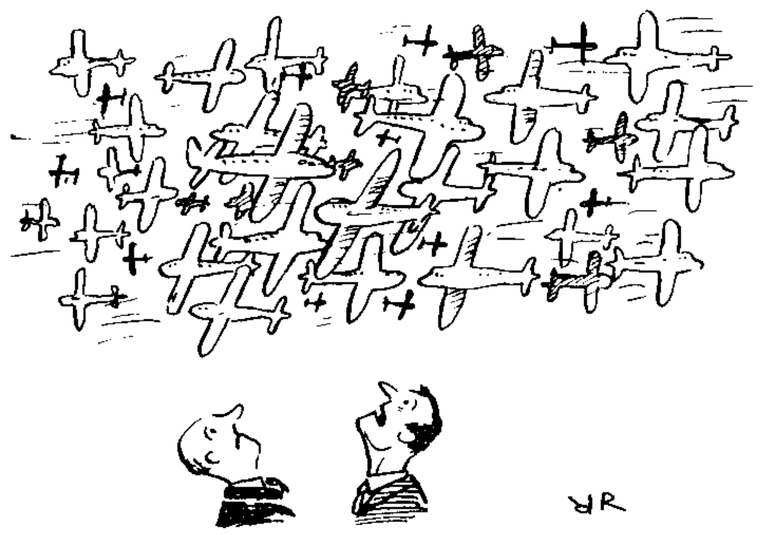
Among the key authors of this clarion call against sleaze, secrecy and centralism was one Ruth Turner, then a Labour National Executive member, now a Blair aide helping police with their inquiries over the loans-for-lordships case.

WHAT does David Cameron's predecessor and mentor, Michael Howard, think of the young leader's plan for green taxes to discourage air travel?

Probably not a lot. For, as the local MP, Howard has given his enthusiastic backing to a monstrous scheme to turn the little airfield at Lydd, in the middle of Romney Marsh, into a huge "new London airport" with 500,000 travellers a year initially – rising eventually to two million. The man behind the plan is the airfield's owner, Saudi arms dealer Sheikh Fahad al-Athel, a former business partner of Jonathan Aitken.

The proposed air terminal will be next to a world-renowned RSPB reserve and a supremely beautiful area of wilderness. Even the quango SEERA (South East England Regional Assembly), which is usually pro-development, has come out against it. So have the RSPB and the Council to Protect Rural England. But not Michael Howard or the Tory-controlled Kent County Council, who are supporting the scheme because they think it'll bring jobs to the area, regardless of the environmental consequences.

If this isn't enough to persuade Dave to have a quiet word with Howard, he should also be aware that the scheme has dire consequences for one of his party's elder statesmen. If the airport is built, Bill Deedes's home golf course at Littlestone, bang next to it, will be turned into a clone of Hounslow.



"We need some 'blue sky thinking' on this"

RESIDENTS of the nation's sink housing estates should be reassured that MPs and housing experts are taking their problems seriously.

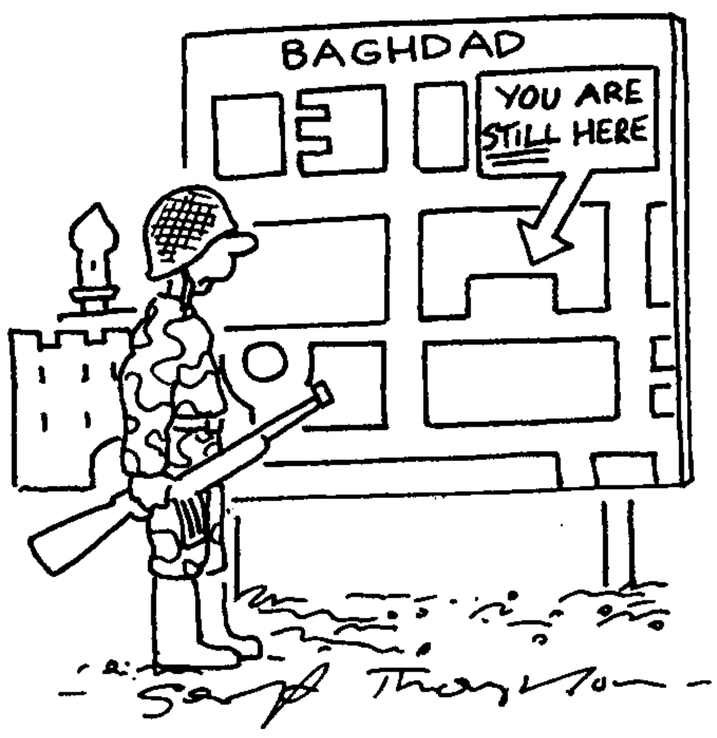
Regeneration bigwigs have been invited to visit the House of Commons and meet housing and planning minister Yvette Cooper next month. So is this a serious-minded seminar on tackling deep-rooted problems?

Er, no. The invitation is to a "Champagne Reception" with a "theme" of regenerating housing estates. Cheers!

THE Information Commissioner's naming and shaming of firms for discarding customers' personal information in bins outside their offices – described as an "unacceptable" breach of trust and data protection laws – is somewhat embarrassing for the bank whose carelessness kicked off the investigation: HBOS.

In February last year a concerned punter found cut-up visa cards in bins outside the bank's Fareham branch – which he could quickly put back together to see credit card numbers and signatures. Other gaffes were unearthed at Manchester and Bristol branches.

Just before Christmas, Gordon Brown launched the Public Private Forum on Identity Management to combat rising identity fraud. And which prominent banker did he choose to lead the forum? Why, a certain James Crosby, who at the time that HBOS was tossing around its customers' details was chief executive of ... HBOS!



FORMAL complaints about the disgraceful state of military families' accommodation went up by precisely 100 percent in 2006, Labour MP Lindsay Hoyle has discovered.

The reason, admits defence minister Derek Twigg, is "the introduction of the Housing Prime Contract and the initial problems with the service being delivered". This is the deal awarded to MODern Housing Solutions, one of the trendy-name-crap-service companies that has done so well under New Labour (see last *Eye*). More worrying still, according to a regional forces commander at an Armed Forces Families conference last year, the company's response rate for urgent call-outs was 63 percent against 90 percent in the pre-outsourcing days – worse by a third. In a report on the state of military housing last week, the National Audit Office pointed out that "the problems are being addressed, albeit with the injection of an additional £20m by the [MoD]". In other words, more taxpayer cash less than two years into the deal.

MODern Housing Solutions is a consortium led by Carillion. In the same year it was letting military families down, its profits shot up by, er, around a third, to £68m.

CRICKET MURDER INQUIRY

EDITORIAL
6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN.
Tel: 020 7437 4017. Fax: 020 7437 0705.
Email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk
Website: www.private-eye.co.uk

PRIVATE EYE SUBSCRIPTIONS/SALES
PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8FA.
Subscription enquiries: 01795 414 871
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ABC

MILIBAND WAGON

Street Of Shame

"GIVE us a tax break Budget", the *News of the World* begged Gordon Brown, as it bemoaned the fact that "Britons are among the most heavily hit people on earth" by tax.

Actually, not everyone in the UK has suffered so badly at the hands of the revenue. One British company, whose annual profits regularly run to hundreds of millions of pounds, has paid next to no net corporation tax for the last decade, courtesy of a complex system of offshore holding companies.

The company is of course News International, which owns the *Screws*. One reason why the tax burden is now at "£10,000 a year for every person in the UK, blunting the incentive to work harder and earn more", as the paper claims, is that the Chancellor's coffers have been depleted by corporate tax-avoidance schemes such as that run by the Dirty Digger. For some reason, this is an issue which has yet to vex *NoW* leader-writers.

AFTER asking if any of his hacks were willing to volunteer for redundancy, *Indie* editor Simon Kelner has been alarmed to learn that most of them are indeed only too desperate to flee.

Although he originally planned on 25 redundancies, such has been the demand that Kelner is now "letting go" no fewer than 40 staff. And a costly business it is too, since they include almost all the remaining hacks who have been there since the launch more than 20 years ago – including Jamie Fergusson, Terry Kirby, Matt Hoffmann and Barrie Clement. With pay-offs calculated at one month's pay for each year of service, plus an extra three months' pay thrown in for good measure, each of them will depart with a cheque equal to two years' salary.

How the *Indie* and *Sindie* will continue to appear is something of a mystery. At the *Sindie* the home reporting staff will now consist of precisely one person, Sophie Goodchild. What happens when she goes on holiday?

CAROLYN McCALL, chief executive of Guardian Media Group, was in bullish form last week as she announced the sale of a 49 percent share in Trader Media Group – publisher of *AutoTrader* – to venture capital firm Apax Partners.

"This deal is good news for the group," she informed staff at the *Grauniad* and *Observer*. "A sale of a minority stake to Apax not only creates the greatest value for GMG, but is also in the best interests of TMG's long-term growth plans… We have been able to select the best partner from a highly competitive field of bidders. We have chosen that partner very carefully to ensure that they share our commitment to developing TMG over the long term."

Staff at *AutoTrader*, and indeed McCall's other titles, may not share her optimism. At the beginning of March, in an article warning that private equity companies "are a risk to the economy as a whole", the *Observer* highlighted the sale of Germany's federal publisher to a private equity group in 2001. "Then it had 4,000 employees. It now… has less than 900 workers and there is talk that the German government may buy the firm back."

The private equity firm in question? Apax Partners.

THE *Spectator*'s transformation into a glossy but bland in-flight magazine continues apace.

Not content with appointing Sarah Standing, co-owner of upmarket children's shop Semmalina, as "style and travel editor", editor Matthew d'Ancona has banned his "Low Life" columnist Jeremy Clarke from mentioning sex or drugs ever again. D'Ancona and his boss, Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill, apparently fear that the merest whiff of bohemianism might frighten off the glossy but bland readers who are their new target audience.

Rescue may be at hand, however. Rumour has it that former *Spectator* owner Algy Cluff is looking for fellow tycoons who might be willing to buy the magazine from the Barclays and restore some of its old robustness.

EXCITABLE *Observer* editor Roger Alton, who has been trying to arrange an exclusive valedictory interview with Tony Blair, is increasingly frustrated by Downing Street's slowness to take up the invitation.

"For fuck's sake!" he complains to colleagues. "You spend all those years with your head rammed up the guy's arse…"

ALICE Thomson, the embattled Notting Hill society queen, has been fighting a rearguard action not to be dropped as a *Telegraph* columnist.

Thomson, who likes to be thought a friend of David and Samantha Cameron, not to mention Prince Charles and Camilla, has resorted to desperate tactics. She was to be heard in the *Telegraph* offices loudly telling anyone who cared to listen that her sister has become "great friends with Will's wife". Will is Will Lewis, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, and seemingly another rung on the Thomson social ladder.

THE *Telegraph*'s all-singing, all-dancing, all-media website has certainly shown it can compete with Sky News in hyperbole if nothing else.

Last Friday morning the website offered readers a thrilling scoop: "BREAKING NEWS: No arrests yet in Bob Woolmer murder case."

"Why is there nothing about you on MySpace, YouTube or Google? It's like I don't really know you at all!"

PLAYING THE GAMES

COULD there be a more suitable first sponsor for the 2012 Olympics than the one announced this month: Lloyds TSB?

Since the government told the British public back in 2003 that the Olympics would cost less than a third of the price now anticipated, Lloyds TSB has been setting some records of its own. In September that year the bank received the largest ever fine from the Financial Services Authority, £1.9m, for mis-selling risky precipice bonds; it has since had to set hundreds of millions aside to compensate people it mis-sold endowment policies; and it is currently up before the Competition Commission over rip-off payment protection insurance.

"We couldn't wish for a better first partner to join us on the journey to London 2012," announced Organising Committee chairman Lord Coe. Too right – the country's finest financial mis-seller for the financially mis-sold Games.

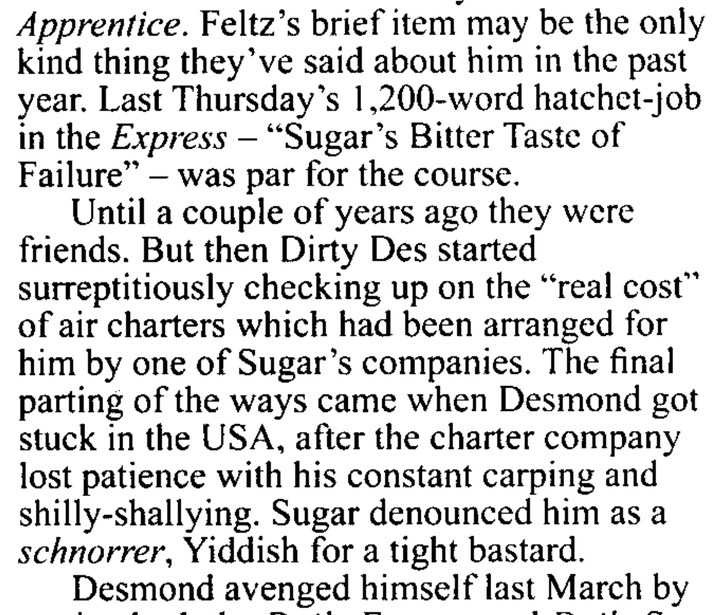
SUGAR V. DESMOND

THE joy of Sir Alan Sugar, Vanessa Feltz informed *Daily Star* readers last week, is that he "doesn't give a stuff. He doesn't care if you love him or loathe him".

The same cannot be said of Feltz's employer, Richard Desmond, whose papers seldom miss a chance to vilify the host of *The Apprentice*. Feltz's brief item may be the only kind thing they've said about him in the past year. Last Thursday's 1,200-word hatchet-job in the *Express* – "Sugar's Bitter Taste of Failure" – was par for the course.

Until a couple of years ago they were friends. But then Dirty Des started surreptitiously checking up on the "real cost" of air charters which had been arranged for him by one of Sugar's companies. The final parting of the ways came when Desmond got stuck in the USA, after the charter company lost patience with his constant carping and shilly-shallying. Sugar denounced him as a *schnorrer*, Yiddish for a tight bastard.

Desmond avenged himself last March by getting both the *Daily Express* and *Daily Star* to copy a story from the *Mail on Sunday* about the divorce of Sugar's son, Simon. ("BITTER SUGAR: Apprentice Boss in £5m Bust-Up with Son's Wife.") Alas! It turned out to be fictitious. Sir Alan collected £30,000 from the porn baron in addition to £80,000 from the *MoS*, all of which he donated to Great Ormond Street Hospital – though not before posing for the delightful picture below.



BUDGET 2007: THE EXPERT VIEW

"Budget Checklist – What to expect: Cutting income tax is not an option, as he does not have the money to spare. A penny off the basic rate would cost the Exchequer £3.5bn." – ***Independent*, 21 March**

"In his 11th and final Budget, the Chancellor unveiled a dramatic cut in the basic rate of income tax from 22p to 20p in the pound, the lowest for 75 years." – ***Independent*, 22 March**

CONFIRMATION this month that the bill for the 2012 Olympics is currently standing at £9.35bn means that, going by the IMF's latest figures, the Games will cost more to stage than the annual gross domestic product of the following competing countries:

Albania, Angitua & Barbuda, Armenia, the Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Dijibouti, Dominica, Eritrea, Fiji, Gabon, the Gambia, Georgia, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Iceland, Jamaica, Kiribati, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Lesotho, Liberia, Macedonia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Moldova, Mongolia, Namibia, Netherlands Antilles, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tomé & Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent & Grenadines, Suriname, Swaziland, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Vanuatu and Zambia.

CRICKETBALLS

ALTHOUGH cricketer Freddie "Andrew" Flintoff is one of the *Sun*'s own columnists, that didn't save him from a stern ticking-off in its editorial after his drunken antics in the Caribbean were exposed.

"They [the England management] finally sent a message that the heavy-boozing culture would not be allowed back into the team," it declared. "Freddie should be setting an example to the young players, not leading some of them on a bender."

That was not quite the line the *Sun* took in 2005 after Flintoff's post-Ashes drinking binge. "Ashes to Lashes, Stuff of Legend: Fred on the batter" ran one headline as it enthusiastically listed the bars and beverages that the all-rounder had taken in during his all-night pub crawl. The paper hailed "a night of world-class drinking" and "a glorious booze bender".

The *Mirror* also got in on the Fred-bashing act last week. "Boozed-up England cricketers not only let themselves down but, more importantly, the fans who pay the wages that pay the bar bills," inveighed the "Voice of the Mirror". Again, it was a different story 18 months ago when lad-mag editor Bill Borrows was enlisted to sing his praises: "Freddie went on a 32-hour drinking marathon that will, quite rightly, go down alongside the best binges in history... Arise, Sir Frederick, a grateful nation of idiot men is pleased to salute you."

The Flintoff pedalo story was broken by the *News of the World* cricket correspondent David Norrie. What Norrie didn't report was that Freddie's drinking exploits during the winter series in Australia were scarcely any less heavy. During that tour, he was regularly seen propping up the bar in the early hours with one D. Norrie.

NICE to see county cricketer and sports psychologist Jeremy Snape stressing the importance of "physical preparation and suitable lifestyle" in his latest *Wisden Cricketer* column.

"The top players," Snape points out, "are usually the ones prepared to sacrifice more, to be more dedicated."

This is the same Jeremy Snape, currently attached to the England coaching team, who was out drinking with Freddie Flintoff and four others at Rumours nightclub in St Lucia, shortly after their abject defeat against New Zealand and only a day before a big World Cup game.

Dedication indeed!

FREDDIE FLINTOFF isn't the only Englishman at the World Cup whose brain seems slightly fuddled.

"How quickly fortune's wheel can turn," *Guardian* cricket correspondent Mike Selvey mused on 14 March. "Last week, the West Indies were humiliated by Pakistan, bowled out for 85. But yesterday at Sabina Park, which has been massively developed, they gained revenge when it mattered."

Er, not quite. The team which bundled the West Indies out for 85 in a warm-up match was not Pakistan but India. So hard to tell these chaps apart, isn't it?

JUST FANCY THAT!

'Bob 'dies of drugs & booze overdose': EXCLUSIVE. Cricket legend Bob Woolmer died last night of a suspected overdose of prescription drugs and alcohol." – **Daily Mirror**, 19 March, page 1.

"IT'S MURDER. OFFICIAL: WOOLMER WAS STRANGLED." – **Daily Mirror**, 23 March, page 1.

HACKWATCH

Keeping Up With The Joneses

"WE LOVE nothing better than a good heated debate," the editor of *First* magazine announced last week. "So we are thrilled that columnists Liz Jones and her husband have joined our team of great writers." Each week, we are promised, Ms Jones (43) and hubby Nirpal Dhaliwal (32) "will write on a range of hot topics".

Global warming, perhaps? The prospects for democracy in Iraq? Probably not. The evidence from elsewhere – Liz's weekly diary for the *Mail on Sunday* and Nirpal's *Evening Standard* columns, not to mention his pisspoor autobiographical novel *Tourism* – suggests that these are two minds with but a single hot topic between them...

4 February. More than a month after Christmas, Liz is still angry about her present from Nirpal. "OK, he bought me earrings, but could he not have spent more than £375 on them?" she grumbles in the *Mail on Sunday*. "The pair I bought myself seven years ago cost £800." When she says she hates him, he retreats to bed. "Don't get in there!" she yells. "I've just made it and you will ruin it." He slinks up to the spare room. "I can't stand this!" Liz howls.

7 February. To mark National Marriage Week, Nirpal offers *Standard* readers some useful tips from his own experience. A successful marriage requires an "extraordinary range of skills: the ability to keep one another amused and intellectually stimulated, sexually captivated and emotionally reassured".

11 February. "Why did you only spend £375 on my Christmas present, you mean bastard?" Liz demands. Nirpal compounds the offence by declining to watch *ER* with her, preferring to read a book. "Get the fuck out of my house!" she tells him. He disappears into the night. She thinks he might never come back.

18 February. He's back. Ever the multi-tasker, Liz is watching *Celebrity Big Brother* while also berating Nirpal for (a) having an affair with an American woman, and (b) not having unwrapped the iPod Liz gave him for Christmas. "You don't respect me or care about me," she wails. After Nirpal retires to bed she consoles herself with *Sex in the City*, "the episode in which Carrie learns that her girlfriends are more important to her than any man". Then she goes to the bathroom for "my elaborate cleansing routine, something I never fail to do no matter how overwrought I am".

25 February. Why are more younger men dating older women? The *Sunday Times* naturally turns to Nirpal for an explanation. He attributes it to the "unabashed sexuality" of fortysomethings such as his wife. "They have shown me what carnivorous creatures women are, with a sexual appetite just as physical and primal as any man's." He describes the attraction between him and Liz as "intensely sexual". But alas! On the very same day, Liz reveals in the *Mail on Sunday* that "I can't remember the last time we had sex. I don't think he has kissed me on the mouth since last September." Worse still, he keeps forgetting to put the rubbish in the recycling bins.

4 March. When a man at the dry-cleaners mistakes Nirpal for Liz's son, she has to face the truth: "I am too old for him... I reckon I have a year, tops, before bits of me start to fall off or seize up." Then Nirpal will have every right to sleep with other women again. "It is my fault, really. I should never have lied about my age, telling him I was 36 when we met."

11 March. "We have what could safely be described as a sexless marriage," Liz laments. "I can't remember the last time we were even vaguely intimate in bed." She seeks solace by browsing a website called projecthorses.co.uk, "where you can read about a horse's emotional problems".

18 March. Liz returns from a trip to New York to find that Nirpal has turned on the overhead light in the kitchen. "That is it," she tells him. "I have had enough of you." How dare he use this light, which she hates? Doesn't he care that she's unhappy? He replies that if he turns off the overhead light she'll simply find another excuse to be miserable. Liz announces that she wants a divorce.

21 March. In the *Standard*, Nirpal says his wife is "like an ox on amphetamines" – beset by "frenzied anxieties" about her weight, outfits and choice of partner. As he concludes with a shrug: "No man will ever appreciate the turbocharged nature of female existence." Meanwhile, in his inaugural column for *First*, he opines that "confident men are sexy because women know they're not afraid to take charge in the sack, get down and dirty and blow their minds". Could he by any chance be thinking of himself? Not according to Liz's column on the same page. "Like most men, my husband thinks an occasional marathon banging in bed will 'keep me happy'," she complains. "Why on earth do otherwise intelligent men not realise that putting our legs uncomfortably in the air once a week is not the way to keep us happy in the long term?"

She should count her blessings. If their love-life wasn't so wretched, what on earth would these self-absorbed half-wits have to write about?

FOOT-BALLS

MORE WOE for the *Eye*'s favourite football agent, Paul Stretford, in his quest to avoid facing an FA disciplinary tribunal over allegedly stealing Wayne Rooney from another agent and about his evidence at a blackmail trial where he was both alleged victim and star witness.

The blackmail case had to be abandoned when documents emerged showing that our hero apparently had some difficulty with telling the truth. And a year ago the High Court also had some difficulty in accepting Stretford's claim that as an FA-licenced agent – "one of the most experienced agents in football" according to his own publicity – he was unfamiliar with the FA's disciplinary rules and therefore could not expect to be punished under them; also that, yawn, his "human rights" were being infringed. Nonsense, said, Sir Andrew Morritt, chancellor of the High Court, and last week the Appeal Court threw out the case. Stretford now faces a massive bill for costs.

Life has been going downhill for Stretford ever since he demanded four years ago that the *Eye* pay him £50,000 for damaging his "reputation" by writing about his dealings in the football transfer market.

"Everything alright then, sir?"

TAPPED FOR CASH!

Gordon's last budget was a winner for the big banks who have been bleating about high corporate tax rates for months – ominously citing the attractions of lower taxing economies such as Ireland and other tax havens.

Cue a drop in company tax from 30 percent to 28 percent at a cost to the Exchequer of a couple of billion a year (of which around £60m will be trousered by the needy Barclays bank alone). This will be paid for by a drop in tax allowances for companies that invest in machinery. The tax burden is thus shifted from those who can up-sticks at any moment like the banks, to old-fashioned firms that make things.

Both bankers and manufacturers claim they deserve tax breaks to resist fierce overseas competition. Yet again Brown has listened to the claims of the former but not the latter as he makes the economy increasingly dependent on the City. Could this be the same desperately concerned Chancellor who shot up to Birmingham to empathise with the beleaguered MG Rover just before the last election?

FOREIGN bankers in particular can raise a glass of something expensive to the Brown years.

Once again leaving intact the system of tax breaks for wealthy foreigners resident in the UK – of whom financiers form the largest group – the Chancellor has managed for ten years to preserve Britain as their tax haven. By qualifying as domiciled abroad even though they live here, the so-called "non-doms" pay tax on just a fraction of their income. Along with the bankers they include billionaires such as steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal, whose recent £2m donation to Labour's coffers should hearten Brown in his ambition to be re-elected PM.

For the fifth year in a row the budget small print declared that the rules remain under review – a review so serious that paymaster general Dawn Primarolo recently admitted that no estimates had even been made of how much tax the non-doms would pay without their concession. Despite Brown's promise in opposition to scrap the non-dom rule, and his early rhetoric at the dispatch box – in 1997 he promised a "tax system to benefit the many and not just the few … fair and seen as fair" – nothing was ever likely to happen as long as rich donors and investment bankers were avoiding billions in tax.

IN A fitting last gesture, the Chancellor used his departing budget to announce a £36bn closing down sale of public property.

Brown has known for a while that he might need to sell some family silver to stay within his self-imposed borrowing limits. So three years ago one of his favourite "independent" advisers, Michael Lyons, produced a report euphemistically titled "Towards better management of public sector assets". Since then, more budget deficits and the prospect of billions of PFI debts going on the government's books (see *Eye* 1179), not to mention £6bn of Olympic costs Brown promised the taxpayer wouldn't shoulder, have given the move added urgency.

Although Lyons' plan is billed as a sensible move to offload surplus assets, there's more to it than a quick government car boot sale. It's a blueprint for a massive expansion of the private finance initiative and yet more Brownian financial engineering. Whilst a few assets might be genuinely surplus, many more will still be needed but will be flogged off anyway and then leased back by the government – just as the country's tax offices were in the calamitous Mapeley STEPS deal. Lyons even cited the precursor to STEPS, the Department of Work and Pensions' PRIME property deal, as "a model for outsourcing estate management". Yet, as *Eye* 1176 exposed, this contract, officially valued at £455m and with a "net present cost" of £3.2bn, will in fact end up costing £9.7bn. Even after inflation, that's a huge overshoot (which the government refuses to explain) and an ominous sign of things to come.

SOME especially winsome outfits are competing for the title of Most Deserving Budget Beneficiary following the 20 percent increase in the tax credit for research and development by large companies.

Although several studies suggest the credit, payable on all R&D regardless of whether a company increases its spending, doesn't work as an incentive, it is being extended anyway. One firm that will trouser up to £10m a year for researching new ways of killing people is BAe.

It's only fair they get something; bribes aren't tax deductible.

CALLED TO ORDURE

THEY weren't exactly packed in tight when the Commons debated the bicentenary of the abolition of slave trading. The few MPs who did attend were treated to a mixed cargo: some interesting history but too much special pleading and a heavy wash of windbaggery.

Owing to tooth trouble, plus his inability to read a text, John Prescott was barely semi-coherent. His opening speech discussed today's human trafficking and "the average selling price for an adult woman". This was a serious subject but it was hard to erase entirely from one's mind that here was the sweaty buccaneer who used to sink his digits into Tracey Temple's ample rump.

The two best speeches came from Opposition frontbenchers William Hague and Vincent Cable. Hague has written a biography of William Wilberforce, out soon. Hon Members kept rising to ask questions and Hague responded each time with spontaneous nuggets of history. Labour's Mary Creagh (Wakefield) remarked that it was like "straying into a viva voce examination for a PhD thesis". A Viva? Prescott probably thought it was a Vauxhall saloon car.

Cable, for the Lib Dems, admitted that Gladstone, normally a Liberal pin-up, made his maiden speech in defence of slavery (he was the son of a sugar planter). Cable also noted that Wilberforce's success in getting Parliament to ban the slave trade was all the more amazing for the fact that 420 MPs around that time had shares in the South Sea company, a slaving concern. Would today's Commons ever vote so strongly against its financial interests?

Several MPs had an eye on local concerns. This is a regular trick – get yourself a plug in the constituency rag. Mark Lancaster (Con, NE Milton Keynes) offered some marginal comment about Olney, "the town in which I now live". Jane Kennedy (Lab, Liverpool Wavertree) intervened to make a forgettable point about, yes, Liverpool.

Barry Sheerman (Lab, Huddersfield) pressed the button marked "Irish ethnic grievance", attacking Oliver Cromwell's enslavement of Ireland. Sadiq Khan (Lab, Tooting), an assiduous stroker of Asian votes, slipped in a footnote about Indian indentured labourers.

Michael Jabez Foster (Lab, Hastings and Rye) thought it a "disgrace" that Sierra Leoneans only have £40 a year spent on their welfare whereas our per capita figure is £9,500. To argue this without acknowledging two vastly different economies seems pointless. NB: Foster's constituency is twinned with a town in Sierra Leone.

Anthony Steen (Con, Totnes) prefaced a rambling speech by saying: "I knew little about trafficking a year ago – I thought it was something to do with Parliament square and the one-way system." Good grief. Tobias Ellwood (Con, Bournemouth) had hot news. St Patrick was a slave. So were Aesop and Spartacus! A speech researched on Wikipedia, surely.

Plodder Ellwood even managed to give a name-check to the *Bournemouth Daily Echo*. He rejected all talk of apologies for the slave trade. "Should the fire brigade apologise because the Pudding Lane fire in 1666 was not put out in time and led to the great fire of London?" cried Ellwood.

What was this sailing over the horizon? It was Sir Patrick Cormack (Con, S Staffs), who also once wrote a Wilberforce biography. Tories often try to make cheap advantage of the fact that Wilberforce was one of theirs. Cormack dashed their schemes. "Wilberforce was not a party man. He was the absolute embodiment of what an independent-minded MP can be. He was unprepossessing of appearance, short of stature yet an indomitable spirit. He fought tenaciously, suffered many setbacks. It is good for us to reflect on what a man who never held high office, nor ever aspired to it, could achieve." Just like Sir Patrick!

Hairy leftie Jeremy Corbyn (Lab, Islington N) bemoaned the riches of Empire, as ever. He claimed that Whiteladies Road, Bristol, was "where white ladies went to buy black boys as their slaves". Stephen Williams (Lib Dem, Bristol W) said, "there is no evidence whatever" for this. Corbyn: "There is no evidence to the contrary, either." Well, that's one approach to history!

Ex-vicar Chris Bryant (Lab, Rhondda), often bitter about his former employer, attempted a childish dig at the CofE as a fount of pro-slavery evil. But the day's least generous speech came from Dawn Butler (Lab, Brent S). "As a black African woman I am angry about not being taught my history in school," she snapped. African? Butler was born in London to Jamaican immigrants. After crossly demanding money for black causes she claimed that African slaves "gave their tomorrows for our todays". It is hard to see how they had much say in the matter.

Butler and Khan wanted a Slavery Remembrance Day every year, at which Prescott, down on the front bench, gave a grunt. He may have been calling for a pie but his eruption was taken by Butler and Khan as a government "commitment".

Oh no. You mean there's a danger this debate could become an annual event?

'Gavel Basher'

Harriet Harman admits the public and most Labour members would prefer to see "a contest not a coronation" but, who would challenge Mr Brown?

"It's not Gordon's fault he is so much the best candidate," she says.

Interview, BBC webpage

Submitted by Eddie Gaughan

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

LABOUR MP Stephen Pound was in full flow on the subject of crime on London buses during the Commons adjournment debate of 13 March, at about 10.15pm, when he was – apparently – interrupted by the Lib-Dems' Lembit Öpik. As *Hansard* records…

Stephen Pound: "…I am looking for a recognition from my Hon. Friend the Minister that whereas Transport for London has been an immense success, of which we may all be proud – I happily give way to the Hon. Member for Montgomeryshire."

Lembit Öpik: "It was not my intention to intervene, but such was my enthusiasm for the Hon. Gentleman's arguments and comments that I seem to have nodded with excess vigour. I fully support everything that he says."

Stephen Pound: "I am sure that I am not the first person to have been led astray by the merry smile of the Hon. Gentleman. I am sorry if that is a bit cheeky."

Pound was being wittier than he knew. Lembit's "nodding with excess vigour" was actually a wave to his girlfriend, Cheeky Girl Gabriela Irimia, who had just entered the gallery, out of Pound's line of vision, and was pouting gorgeously at her beau on the benches below. Nifty get-out, Lembit!

LABOUR leadership contender Michael Meacher clearly can't remember what he says from one month to the next – especially when it comes to 'fessing up over how much property he owns.

Earlier this month and in reply to *Independent* reader Gary Browne, who asked why, as a socialist, Meacher owned "so many houses", the muddled MP replied: "As I have regularly stated in the register of Members' interests, I own four flats. I have saved throughout my life, and put my savings into property. I don't think [that] is contrary to socialism."

Maybe, maybe not; but it *is* contrary to the register of members' interests, which in February this year, under land and property, lists "four residential properties in London from which rental income is received" and "a property in the Cotswolds from which rental income was received for two weeks' holiday rental". Not to mention, of course, Meacher's London flat and constituency home in Oldham. That looks like at least seven.

It was Meacher, of course, with his Cotswold holiday home, who once caused outrage by condemning second home owners for preventing young people in rural areas from getting a foot on the property ladder…

PETER HAIN was distinctly unimpressed by Margaret Beckett's reaction to the latest Zimbabwe crisis.

The distinct words "fucking Beckett!", expressed in a nasal, South African-tinged voice, were to be heard outside Hain's Commons office. Three days later Hain wrote a *Mail on Sunday* piece attacking Robert Mugabe. Watch out, Margaret, he may be after your job.

'Backbiter'

NOW that the merger of Amicus and the Transport and General Workers Union has been given the thumbs-up by the rank-and-file – or, rather, by a majority of the 20 per cent of members who bothered to vote – the bosses of the two unions have set tongues wagging by throwing their weight behind Jon Cruddas MP's campaign to succeed John Prescott as deputy PM.

The general-secretary of Amicus, Derek Simpson, shocked the union's executive committee by announcing that there was no point debating who the union would back for deputy PM as he had already authorised a cheque for £15,000 to be made out to Cruddas's campaign; the T&G's Tony Woodley duly followed suit.

The decision to support Cruddas seems odd to many union members because Cruddas is a vocal supporter of the campaign to cut the union vote at Labour party conference from 50 percent to 33 percent.

With big-hitters such as, er, Peter Hain, Harriet Harman, Alan Johnson, Hazel Blears and Hilary Benn already having thrown their hats into the ring, Cruddas's chance of succeeding Prezza are negligible. And it's even harder to fathom why Simpson is supporting Cruddas after making it clear that he won't support left-wing MP John McDonnell's campaign to succeed Blair because "I don't see the point in going out on the field for a glorious defeat".

'Blackleg'

Down on the Farm

ALTHOUGH not famous for their sense of humour, Brussels officials were nevertheless chortling at British headlines over the latest EU farm subsidies scam.

According to the EU-critical think-tank Open Europe, city slickers have been falling over each other to get a share in the UK's farm subsidies, even though they have never been near an animal or the countryside in their lives.

To qualify for subsidies under the EU's new "single farm payment" scheme, all anyone now needs is to be officially classified as a "farmer". And for this one need only lease a minimum of 1.7 acres of "farmland" – a patch of boggy wilderness in the Scottish Highlands will do. Investors have been paying as little as £50 an acre for such worthless ground, to get back annual subsidies worth up to £30 an acre or more. Open Europe itself spent £562.82 to buy such a subsidy entitlement, which it claimed would pay out £306 a year – at least until 2013, when the EU subsidy system is due for its next reform. One property broker who arranges many such "steal deals" explained that "you don't need a farm to claim the entitlements. You could be claiming them sitting in your living room in London." Open Europe itself commented: "Only the EU could have created a situation where people who are not farmers are paid not to farm."

But those Brussels officials may be cleverer than Open Europe knows. In 2004, after years of bitter argument, the EU's then-agriculture commissioner Franz Fischler at last managed to get rid of the long-discredited system of farm subsidies tied to food production. Paying farmers to produce massive surpluses had brought odium on the EU by creating mountains of unwanted butter, beef, grain and the rest. Already an earlier reform designed to reduce these surpluses had only resulted in making them larger. Fischler and his colleagues were determined to find a way to phase out farm subsidies altogether.

They knew, however, that they could not do this in one hit, not least because almost any reform which reduced payments to farmers would be vetoed by the French. So they came up with a cunning plan: they would not reduce the subsidy bill itself, but they would "decouple" subsidies from production, even from the need to produce food at all. Under the new system, farmers would receive a "single farm payment" simply for owning or leasing the land. There would, of course, be a few conditions, known as "cross-compliance", some of which can be so onerous to real farmers that officials have scope to withhold subsidies they are owed.

But the cunning of the new scheme is that it brings the whole system into disrepute, so that people will eventually wake up to it and start asking questions – such as why should taxpayers shell out cash for farmers at all. Then, when the Common Agricultural Policy next comes up for review in 2013, there will be a clamour for subsidies to be abolished altogether. So all those investors now rushing to lease worthless patches of peat bog are in fact playing right into Brussels's hands. The more such scams are publicised, the easier it will be in six years' time to argue that farm subsidies have become indefensible, and the sooner they are scrapped, the better.

'Muckspreader'

"...then, they round up the farmers, squeeze their margins and milk them"

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE LOBBYISTS of Brussels are feeling even more self-congratulatory than usual.

After two years of deliberations, the European Commission has decided against a scheme that would bring the EU into line with the US by requiring lobbyists to reveal their paymasters. Instead, there will be a voluntary register.

Many lobbyists conduct their Brussels hustling openly, but in some cases their motives and ultimate sources of funding are more opaque. In April last year, the *Eye* revealed that two European parliamentarians, Scottish Tory Struan Stevenson and Portuguese socialist Paolo Casaca, have taken expensive gifts and largesse, in contravention of parliamentary rules, from the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a front for groups on EU and US terrorist watch lists.

A new NCRI offshoot, the International Study Committee for Change in Iran, has been cranking up the lobbying lately in a bid to shake off the terrorist label. Stevenson and Casaca remain prominent in pushing the cause, but, as there is no transparency in where the NCRI gets its money from, who exactly stands to benefit from their efforts remains an open question.

The *Eye* is sure that those involved will soon clear up any uncertainty with a full declaration on the commission's voluntary register.

PETER MANDELSON's enthusiasm for the business lobby is well known (*Eyes passim*), but the EU trade commissioner is not alone.

After pressure from the Corporate European Observatory campaign group, commissioners finally 'fessed up the names of their special advisers this month. The list revealed that development commissioner Louis Michel, the man responsible for dishing out EU aid, employs one Etienne Davignon as a special adviser.

Davignon sits on the board of a French water and electricity giant called Suez and holds over £200,000 worth of shares in the firm. Suez is best known in Britain as the owner of the controversial waste firm SITA, but it also has extensive interests in the developing world, including a heavily criticised water privatisation in South Africa. The European Commission said Davignon's role was to "mobilise the private sector for development policies" and advise Michel on "Africa policy, in particular the role of the private sector in the economic development of sub-Saharan Africa" – both areas in which he might be assumed to have a financial interest.

The Corporate European Observatory is now calling for the EC to end Davignon's contract.

EU-phemisms

My country produces big cars

TV

A Class Apart (BBC1)

THE problem is nearly as old as television itself. How do you best accommodate the career aspirations of soap stars who don't want to be soap stars any longer? In the old days, of course, the solution was straightforward: send them down to the Jobcentre and forget they ever existed.

It was, in its way, almost a class issue. Soap acting wasn't real acting. Career aspirations were all very well, but only if they were for a completely different career.

The world has changed, however, and television with it, and now former soap stars have a clout that would have horrified the broadcasting grandees of the past. Series after series have been manufactured around the microscopic talents of Ross Kemp and Michelle Collins, while some of their peers leap from soap to soap, as if trying to collect the set. Jessie Wallace, fresh from her stint as kohl-eyed slapper Kat Slater in *EastEnders*, clearly seeks the former career path; indeed, the BBC is nurturing a number of projects for her, projects that almost certainly wouldn't exist if she didn't need something to do. *A Class Apart* had the same Vanity Television feel about it: an hour and a half of expensive, glossy drama that had no reason to exist, an answer to a question that didn't need to be asked.

Its script was by Tony Grounds, a specialist in whimsical London-based comedy-dramas that, in the past, have had the worrying tendency to star Ray Winstone. In this one Wallace played a typical Grounds character, a lovable London single mum with a troubled but bright and essentially lovable mixed-race son and several even more lovable elderly relatives who got all the best lines. Through a sequence of ever dafter plot developments, her son won a scholarship to the world's poshest school, with a main quad the size of Basingstoke and many of Britain's best actors on its staff. Headmaster Nathaniel Parker was as tall and aristocratic as his Inspector Lynley character, with even shinier shoes. Unfortunately Grounds has never been much cop at writing middle-class characters, and sure enough, all were either supercilious, unimaginative, cold-hearted or all three, saying things like "I just hope for your sake that you haven't overstepped the mark, Anthony".

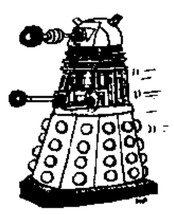
In this respect the film resembled Jessie Wallace's previous place of work, Albert Square, where bourgeois characters are invariably pompous and untrustworthy, if not actually rapists and serial killers. Poor Parker, wandering around Wallace's council estate for the first time, was obliged to look around in horror and disgust as though he had been dropped into a war zone, and had to start sentences with "However, I have come to realise...". Fortunately his speeches became shorter as he realised that Jessie Wallace had a heart of gold. At the end of the film he even took off his tie. You almost expected a crowd of costermongers and pearly queens to throw up their hats and cheer, possibly as a precursor to a spontaneous performance of the Lambeth Walk.

So how does such weary, formulaic drivel get made? With great care and attention, of course. Actors as good as Roger Allam and Juliet Aubrey somehow made the most of cripplingly limited parts, and George Cole acted everyone off the screen, as ever, as the roguish-but-twinkly great-grandpa. But, as a Tony Grounds character might say, you can't polish a turd. Curiously, this is precisely the opposite of the film's underlying message, which is that the turd doesn't need polishing and is intrinsically superior to the polish in all imaginable ways. Probably smells nicer too.

And so another post-soap career takes flight. Whether Jessie Wallace has what Kemp and Collins didn't have isn't yet clear, and was never going to be made clear by *A Class Apart*. Career aspirations, though, are being accommodated, which is the main thing. Unfortunately it's also the only thing, and that's the shame of it all.

'Couch Potato'

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



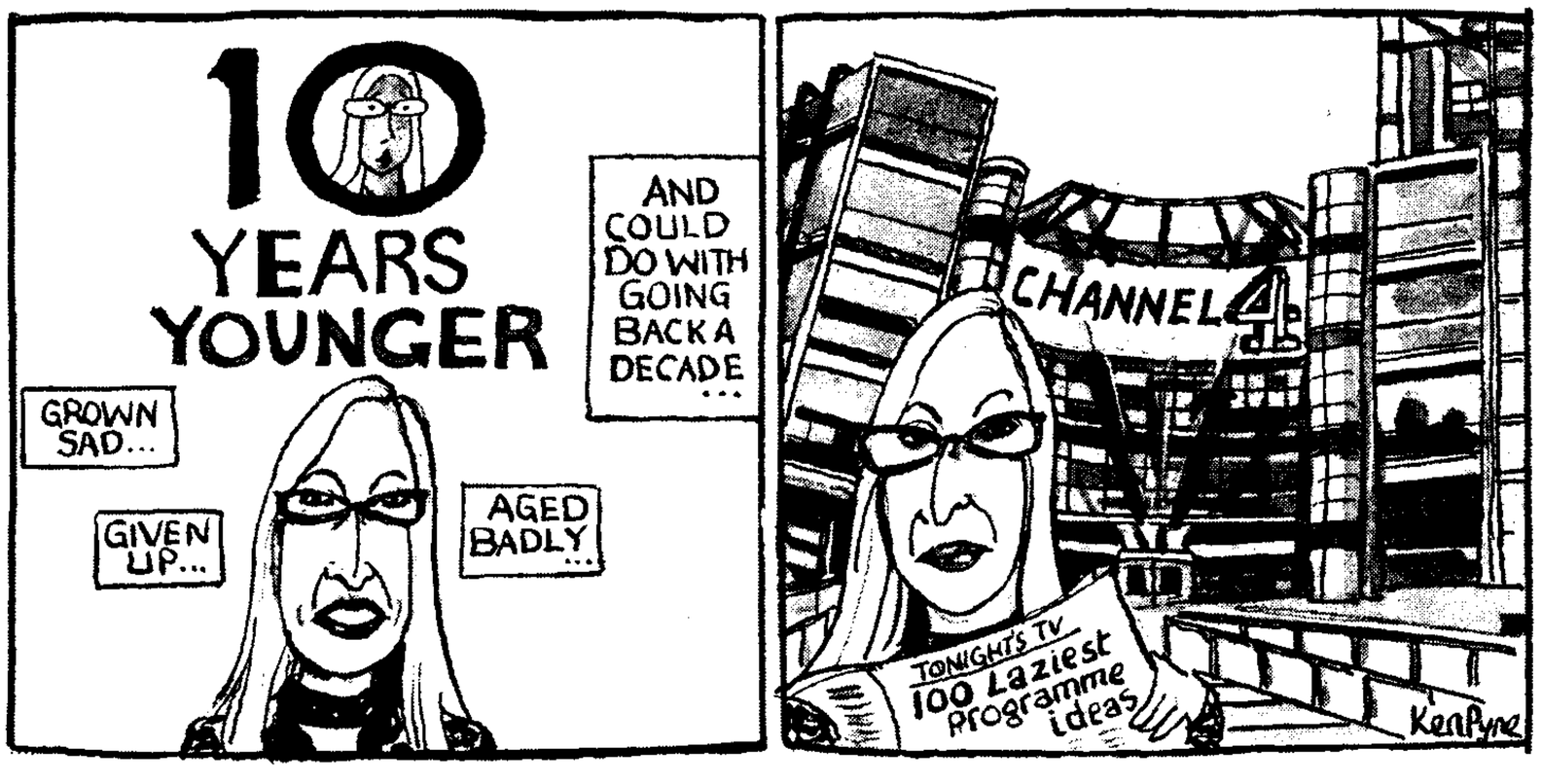
"Ashley Highfield, BBC Director of Future Media & Technology, said: 'This alliance with IBM will offer new and genuinely innovative services to our audiences... Combining the BBC's massive TV and radio archive with IBM's cutting-edge research into video and audio search technology should provide the means to unlocking huge latent value in our long tail of content'... The pilot follows the recent deployment by Siemens of IBM's WebSphere products, which sit at the centre of the BBC's service oriented architecture.'"

– BBC press release

I-SKY

Get Sky snooze!

Sky is to introduce technology that automatically switches digital boxes to standby mode overnight – slashing energy bills by £7.5 million a year... Sky said Auto Standby could save enough energy to light all the homes in Wolverhampton for a year. It could also cut UK carbon emissions by 32,000 tons a year. – *Sun*, 20 March.



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"It's here to stay!!" - Mr. B. Tamax
SIMPLY INSERT RIDICULOUS AMOUNTS OF MONEY TO ACCESS LATEST TECHNOLOGY
BUY NOW!!- BEFORE IT'S OBSOLETE
NEXT WEEK: WE PREVIEW PAYSTATION 4

MEDIA NEWS

DETERMINED not to be outdone by Gordon Brown, who used his ministerial car for the 400-yard journey from Number 11 to the House of Commons to unveil the environmental measures in his Budget, Sky News scrambled a helicopter to follow his trip... and promptly cut to a commercial break, returning just as he arrived.

THE BBC dispatched 20 extra hacks to Iraq last week in order to produce a series of special programmes to mark the fourth anniversary of Saddam's overthrow. But what did all this added expense achieve?

Precious little, say some senior editors at Television Centre. Huw Edwards flew into Basra to make a package for the Six and News 24 about how he got there: by plane from Brize Norton, like everybody else. "It's very hot and we're very tired," he told yawning viewers.

Once he'd had a rest – sharing a tent with all the Sky and ITV journos on the same carefully managed MoD jolly – he set about grovelling to as many of the senior officers who had helped facilitate the trip as he could find. "We have bonded big-time with Major Robbie Davies of 2 Lancs," he gushed in his BBC Online diary. "This guy could transform the Army's PR." That's why he's there, Huw. Edwards then failed to challenge the Major's assertion that things were "all going well".

Newsnight producers were so shocked at the level of news management from the MoD that they decided to ignore the BBC team altogether in their own contribution to the "Iraq 4" series. Instead they relied on "two fictional accounts" from guests, "tonight we premier their dramas" – the managed "reality" of BBC Newsgathering replaced by an entirely fabricated alternative.

THE BBC needed no fewer than four reporters plus crews to cover the opening of the Wembley stadium.

One brought us the latest news: "People have been watching it being built, now it's open." Another was inside: "I'm alongside the pitch at the moment. I'll test the catering and I'll brief you a little more on that later." A third was answering the question, "What does it look like from above?", by circling overhead in a helicopter for four hours. "It looks pretty impressive," was his £4,000 answer.

Back in the studio another hack disclosed that "there's lots of excitement, especially about the hot dogs and the toilets".

Meanwhile BBC sports correspondent Adam Parsons decided that "perhaps today we'd be a little churlish to go on and on about what went wrong" with the much delayed and fabulously expensive project. Cup final tickets all round!!!

GOING LIVE

LIVE now to Bristol Crown Court for the latest on the conviction of Eunice Spry for child abuse (BBC News 24).

John Kay is standing in the street outside: "Er, that's certainly a prison van. It's perfectly possible that Eunice Spry may well be in that prison van...."

"THE JAMAICAN government has had misgivings about the way cricket's governing body has handled events arising out of the murder of Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer, the BBC has learned," announced the corporation's recently appointed sports editor Mihir Bose, fresh off a flight to Jamaica last weekend.

The BBC has had misgivings about the way Mihir Bose and some of his colleagues handled them too, *Private Eye* has learned. When it was announced late on Thursday night that Jamaican police believed Woolmer had been asphyxiated, producers on Five Live's Anita Anand show attempted to get Bose on air to give his reaction – only to be told that although he was indeed awake and following the story, he was not prepared to go on air and talk about it until the following morning's *Today* programme on Radio 4. Bemused, they contacted the news organiser who oversees the availability of correspondents across all networks – and were told that the murder of one of the coaches at the Cricket World Cup was "not the kind of story" the sports editor was expected to cover.

As Five Live controller Bob Shennan put it in an outraged email the following day: "some questions need to be asked in the cold light of day."

News 24, meanwhile, had no news team due to arrive in Jamaica until the following day, and hence missed the vital press conference at which the evidence of "asphyxia as a result of manual strangulation" was announced by police. The corporation's foreign desk was forced to call its rival Sky News, the only UK broadcaster with cameras there, and suggest that they might like to share the footage "on a pool basis".

It was left to editors at Sky to point out that this arrangement would not be so much a "pool" as a, er, river, flowing in one direction and carrying their exclusive with it – and suggest that the BBC try looking elsewhere.

FARCICAL scenes at the recording of the first of this year's Reith lectures, which will be broadcast on 11 April.

Not only did the lecturer, American economist Jeffrey Sachs, turn up without a script; when the time came for questions from the floor, the first hand raised was that of Geri Halliwell, the former Ginger Spice.

The BBC had apparently invited her in the hope of making Sachs's thoughts on "global challenges" more appealing to younger listeners. But another specially invited guest, former ambassador Sir Christopher Meyer, was unimpressed by the dumbing-down. He announced, on tape, that during the course of the evening he had learned nothing new. Whether his verdict survives the editing process remains to be seen.

HATS OFF to Natasha Kaplinsky, the BBC newsreader and co-presenter of the *Six O'Clock News*.

Kaplinsky signed off a package in which grieving fathers spoke about the deaths of their sons while serving in Iraq with the words: "Heartbreaking stuff, let's go to the weather now with Peter."

LAST AUTUMN, as BBC News staff went on strike over proposed job cuts, managers had a succinct response to those who pointed out that rolling service News 24 was expected to function with only three staff in the gallery, whereas Sky News had six or seven.

"News 24 is currently the RTS News Channel of the year," pointed out News Production Facilities (NPF) manager Robin Rees.

Last month News 24 lost the RTF award to... Sky News, amid much gnashing of teeth among senior managers. They still plan to slash 20 NPF staff out of a total of 70.

DUMB BRITAIN

Sudo-Q, BBC1

Eamonn Holmes: What travels at 300 million miles a second?

Contestant: A cheetah.

Junior Mastermind, BBC1

John Humphrys: Which stretch of water did comedian David Walliams swim across in 10 hours 34 minutes?

Contestant: The Atlantic.

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: In clubs and societies, which word for a dark-coloured spherical object means to veto?

Contestant: Pardon?

Robinson: In clubs and societies, which word for a dark-coloured spherical object means to veto?

Contestant: Custard.

IN THE THEATRE

POOR reviews for Dame Maggie Smith in *The Lady From Dubuque*. One critic stood out in his praise, however: Michael Coveney (once of the *FT*, now ploughing a lonely furrow at Whatsonstage.com) thought the show "brilliantly cast, superbly acted".

Could this be the same Michael Coveney who was employed to write a glowing piece for the production's programme? It certainly could!

AD NAUSEAM

LAST MONTH a note appeared on the Advertising Standards Authority's website announcing that a complaint against BP had been "informally resolved". The public was not told what it concerned, just that the matter was closed.

So what was it all about? In January 2006, ASA received written complaints about a national press and TV ad for BP's Ultimate fuel. Both ads claimed that if every driver in the 13 countries in which Ultimate was available used the fuel, "the reduction in harmful emissions would be equivalent to taking ten million cars off the road".

As the timelag implies, ASA's investigations team examined this assertion at some length. It looked at BP's evidence, obtained expert advice and created a draft recommendation, which the *Eye* has seen. It concluded that the ads breached codes on substantiation, truthfulness, environmental claims, misleading advertising, evidence and qualifications: complaint resoundingly upheld.

This was passed on to ASA's council for a final adjudication. Yet the council decided not to publish the report or adjudicate, telling the complainants that BP had provided written assurance that it would not repeat the claim. This kind of assurance does not normally negate a formal ASA adjudication. Why did BP get special treatment? One of the complainants informed the *Eye* that he had been told by ASA's investigations manager, Russell Gordon, that BP threatened to sue.

ASA's press office would not confirm this, but staff had no answer as to why the complaint against BP had quietly disappeared after being upheld on six counts. Many millions of people will have seen BP's ad extolling the cleanliness of its fuel, yet, if ASA had got its way, no one would have known the ad was bogus. How many other dodgy advertising claims are being whistled away by our trusty regulator?

ORDER OF THE BROWN NOSE

LINDA BARKER, the interior designer who fronted adverts for the sofa retailer DFS, was kind enough to answer 20 questions for Bradford's *Telegraph and Argus* on 17 March.

"**Question**: Who do you admire, and why?

"**Answer**: Lord Graham Kirkham, who runs DFS. He is a genius businessman and who has [sic] an art collection that takes your breath away."

OH, YEAH? "I'm a lot less well off [since I married Paul]. I was a $30,000-$50,000-an-hour public speaker..."

– *Heather Mills McCartney, Larry King Show*

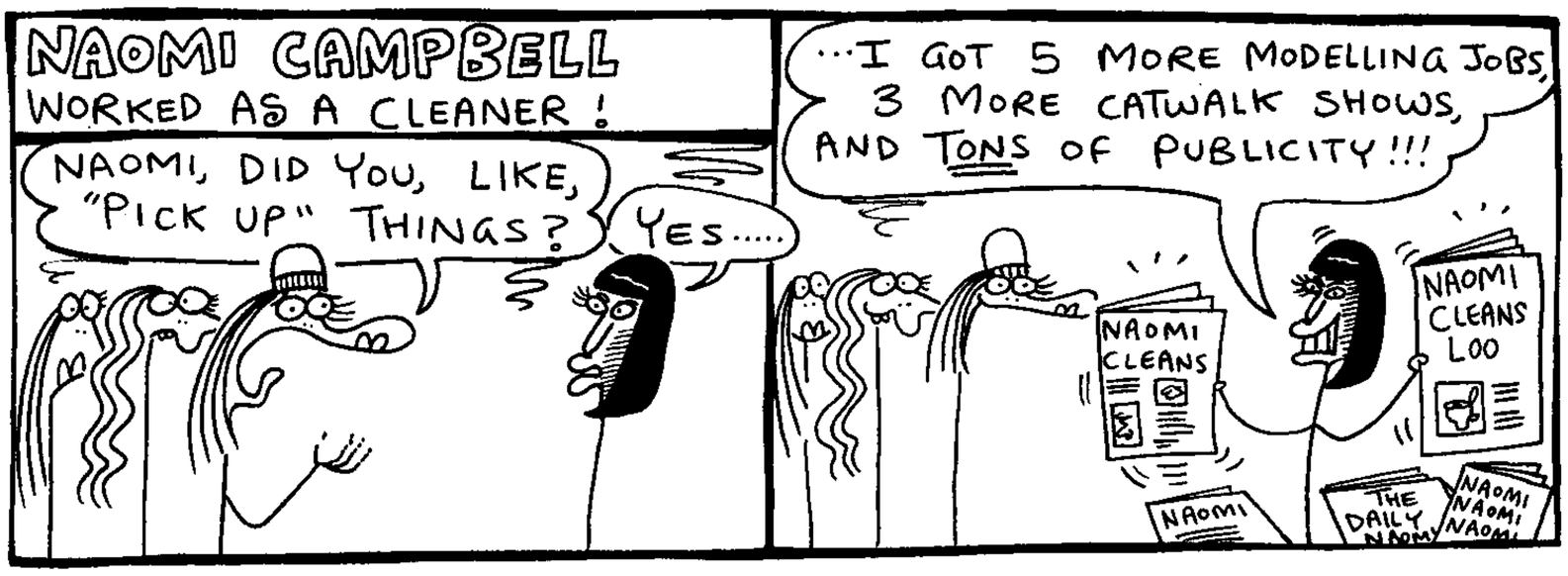
CHAPLIN

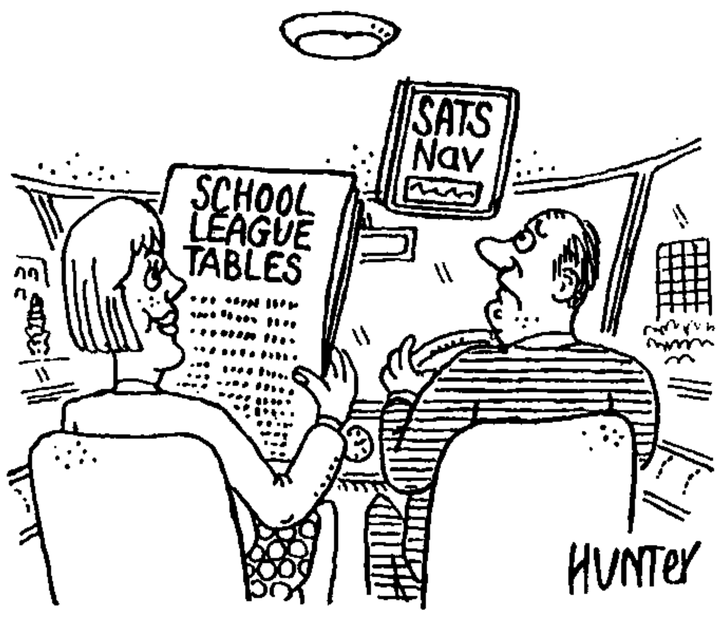
This post is for 12.5 hours per week (1.00-3.30pm Mon-Fri), term time only Salary will be up to £7,000 per annum

St George's C of E School advertisement, Bexley Times

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


NAOMI CAMPBELL WORKED AS A CLEANER!
NAOMI, DID YOU, LIKE, "PICK UP" THINGS?
YES.....
...I GOT 5 MORE MODELLING JOBS, 3 MORE CATWALK SHOWS, AND TONS OF PUBLICITY!!!
NAOMI CLEANS
NAOMI CLEANS LOO
NAOMI
THE DAILY NAOMI
NAOMI NAOMI NAOMI



EDUCASHUN NEWZ

IN *EYE* 1150 we suggested that the shambles surrounding the PFI rebuild of all five secondary schools in Exeter boded ill for the government's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) plans – to refurbish and rebuild all secondary schools through private finance deals in the next 15 years.

Work by contractors Mowlem had run over a year late, leaving thousands of children without proper classrooms in 2006. A year on, the schools have been "finished" by Carillion, which bought Mowlem last year. So how's it looking for BSF?

Not great. The company says "snagging" will be finished by this September, but there's an awful lot to fix. Sweltering pupils and teachers have been told to deal with soaring classroom temperatures by opening windows. Sports pitches at two of the schools will remain out of bounds until the summer because of sharp and stony materials in their surfaces, and, as reported in *Eye* 1175, Carillion has already tried once to close down a Lottery-funded community sports pitch on a site next to one of the schools in order to avoid the cost of staffing it at evenings and weekends.

But it was Carillion's response to a flea outbreak at St Luke's Science and Sports College that was the last straw. This month the local *Express and Echo* reported an internal council email in which exasperated chief executive Richard Buzzacott complained that rather than tackle the flea outbreak when it first happened, and getting the work done over a weekend, the school had had to be closed while a Carillion chief asked for money to carry out the treatment. "WHAT PLANET DOES HE LIVE ON?!!" asked Buzzacott.

That would be Planet PFI.

North Pole Expedition 2010

POSTCARD FROM BELFAST

WHILE Northern Ireland secretary Peter Hain limbers up for the deputy leadership contest, an official inquiry has started hearing oral evidence on whether the perma-tanned proconsul tried to pervert the course of justice.

London barrister Peter Scott QC was appointed last December by attorney-general Lord Goldsmith to investigate whether the Northern Ireland Office, at Hain's instigation, deliberately misled the High Court in Belfast about the appointment of Mrs Bertha McDougall as Interim Victims' Commissioner.

McDougall, a 59-year-old former teacher and widow of a police reservist assassinated by the INLA, was given the job by Hain in October 2005. Her ability and integrity are not questioned: she is a founder-member of Forgotten Families, a lobby group for victims of paramilitary violence. What is under scrutiny is how she came to be chosen.

Since the post hadn't been advertised before her appointment was announced, there was an immediate suspicion in the nationalist community that it was a concession to Ian Paisley's DUP, part of a continuing effort to coax them towards power-sharing. Brenda Downes, whose husband was killed by a plastic bullet fired by a police reservist, made a freedom of information request in December 2005 asking who had been consulted about the appointment. The NIO replied in January last year that "no consultation was considered necessary and none took place… Mrs McDougall was considered by ministers as the best candidate for the interim position."

Downes persisted, asking the High Court last March for permission to seek a judicial review. As the NIO submitted sworn evidence that the January letter had been accurate, the court ruled that the question of improper political motive didn't arise. When Downes asked the appeal court to reinstate her claim, the NIO again provided sworn evidence that there HAD BEEN NO CONSULTATION.

Whoops! At this point Paisley's DUP colleague Jeffrey Donaldson MP, pressed by journalists, conceded that his party had been "fully" consulted about the appointment and was "delighted" by the outcome. Amid some confusion in court, the Northern Irish chief justice allowed Downes to proceed after all.

At the judicial review which followed before Mr Justice Girvan, the head of the Northern Ireland civil service swore an affidavit which he said had been seen and approved by Hain, admitting that there had been political input into the process: it was the DUP which had suggested McDougall to Hain.

When Downes asked for Hain to be called as a witness, Girvan agreed. His response was to have another affidavit lodged by a senior official, NIO political director Jonathan Phillips. This revealed that the DUP hadn't nominated McDougall on its own initiative: Hain had had it conveyed to the party that "if they wished to informally propose a particular individual for the interim appointment, he would consider their recommendation". Phillips also said that Hain had personally ordered that no other party be consulted. It later emerged that McDougall had been informed of her appointment by Donaldson.

Mr Justice Girvan concluded that there had indeed been an improper political motive for the appointment. "I am satisfied," he added, "that the information supplied in the [FoI] letter of 5 January 2006 was evasive, misleading and in certain respects clearly wrong." And, since that letter formed the substance of NIO evidence at the proceedings in March and May, "it must be concluded that it was decided that the correct information should not be placed before the court." The case raised "very serious issues which should be the subject of immediate and searching inquiry at a high level". If incorrect and misleading information was given, "that conduct would appear to fall within the concept of perverting the course of justice".

Girvan forwarded the papers to the attorney general, who asked Peter Scott QC to investigate. Having spent January and February wading through dozens of lever-arch files of evidence, Scott is now beginning his oral hearings, which are likely to continue in April and May.

SIGNAL FAILURES

FCC: still a tight wheeze

WHEN First Capital Connect banned discount tickets on evening-peak Thameslink trains north of the Thames last June, the stated aim was to reduce overcrowding. But the *Eye* has obtained figures which suggest that, for many commuters, the ban has had no effect.

The figures show the three most overcrowded trains before and after June. The most overcrowded train used to carry 50 percent more passengers than its capacity (seats plus standing spaces); after the ban the most overcrowded train was 22 percent above capacity. But the second and third most overcrowded trains had, in total, more passengers in excess of capacity after the ban than before it.

The figures support commuters' perceptions, revealed in a survey by the statutory watchdog Passenger Focus. It concluded the ticket restrictions "do not appear to have resulted in any major changes in behaviour", that "only a small minority have changed their journey times as a result", and "trains are perceived to be the same or more crowded". But FCC won't lift the restrictions, because they're driven by "new" Labour policy. Their real purpose is to raise cash for FCC to pay the £808m premium the government demanded when it awarded the new franchise.

There's more to come. Last week South West Trains announced "fares changes" (i.e. a price hike of up to 20 percent) to reduce numbers of passengers on off-peak morning trains arriving in London after 10am. SWT must pay a £1.2bn premium to the Treasury during its new franchise, which started last month – when SWT dumped 120 carriages as surplus to requirements.

WHO will be liable when a rail passenger is injured or killed using a replacement bus?

One *Eye* reader asked that question after a hair-raising bus experience between Doncaster and York. Two plain white minibuses left together, carrying passengers who had paid to travel in GNER trains which meet stringent safety requirements. The buses were cramped and the aisles packed with luggage. The drivers stopped to fill up at a garage before tearing along the A1(M), tailgating other vehicles. The reader estimated they exceeded 80mph at times. On his bus loud music played and the driver chatted with a passenger as he sped along.

Happily for GNER, minibuses do not have to be fitted with tachographs and it was impossible "to determine the actual speeds travelled". GNER forwarded the reader's complaint to Fraser Eagle Management Services, which has made a fortune from arranging replacement buses using sundry bus and taxi firms. The reader twice asked GNER who would pay compensation, and how much, if a passenger was killed on a replacement bus, but he received no reply.

Network Rail quickly admitted responsibility for last month's accident in Cumbria, in a situation where no other company could take the rap. If a replacement bus came to grief, there'd be endless scope for buck-passing between: Network Rail, usually the cause of buses being deployed; the train operator which collected the fares; Fraser Eagle as contractor; and the subcontractor which provided buses and drivers.

P.S. Although buses are as integral to the 21st century rail network as trains, one *Eye* reader was told by a rail employee this month that an expensive facelift for Sheffield station now prevents replacement buses dropping off beside the concourse. His bus terminated beyond the city bus station, leaving passengers to walk half a mile through the streets with their luggage to catch their onward trains.

'Dr B Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

CLOKIE OF SECRECY

MARTIN BACON, who resigned last week as the £100,000 managing director of the regeneration body Ashford Future, had an unusual approach to the task of bringing thousands of new jobs and homes to the Kent borough.

Apart from working with "key public, private and government partners to manage the Ashford growth programme", it has emerged that Bacon found time in his hectic schedule – up to four hours a day, in fact – to download vast quantities of internet porn and to arrange visits to prostitutes via email. Ashford borough council's Conservative leader, Paul Clokie, and chief executive David Hill took a sympathetic approach when they found out. Instead of firing Bacon on the spot, as might have happened in other less enlightened boroughs, they sent him on a month's "gardening leave" on full pay to get over the stress of being caught. Alas, a mole in the council tipped off a local whistleblowing website, www.wattyler.com, which put the story on the net, prompting Bacon's resignation. The *Eye* wanted to ask Messrs Hill and Clokie why they had kept schtum about the porn fiend in their midst, but ABC's spokeswoman refuses to entertain any questions, bizarrely citing "the data protection act".

HALL OF BLAME

SO FAREWELL, then, Brian Hall, the Pembrokeshire council cabinet member who in 2005 declared that if BBC Wales reporter Simon Morris ever went to Ireland, he would never come back (*Eye* 1152) – and that he knew "people" in Manchester who would break Morris's legs.

Hall felt it was impertinent for Morris to have asked him about his Irish business connections. Despite the Local Government Ombudsman for Wales finding that Hall's behaviour was in breach of the councillors' code of conduct, council leader John Davies refused to sack him. Dai Knacker declined to act because Hall's threats were made to third parties, at a BBC reception, and not to Morris directly. Davies did refer the matter to Pembrokeshire council's standards committee, which in January ruled that Hall had not "brought the council into disrepute" because it couldn't be certain he attended the reception as a representative of the council – even though he claimed expenses for doing so! Hall's solicitor Tony Child, who last year represented London mayor Ken Livingstone in his successful appeal against suspension for comparing an *Evening Standard* reporter to a Nazi concentration camp guard, once again employed the "Ken defence" – that to punish Hall would infringe his human rights by depriving him of freedom of speech.

Alas Hall has now been stabbed in the back by his ruling Independent Group colleagues who, fearing an electoral backlash if they continue to support him, have forced him to resign from the cabinet. A black day for freedom of speech in Wales!

● THE wheeze whereby councillors behaving badly get away with it because their violent or boorish behaviour did not take place on council business has also been applied in Bath. Conservative councillor Brian Webber, 69, treasurer of the Sydney Gardens bowling club, got into an argument with a female HM Revenue and Customs valuation officer who visited the club, which ended with the woman receiving hospital treatment after being slammed against a wall by the irate Tory. Webber has received a formal caution from Knacker for "assault by beating" but has not resigned because "this has nothing to do with my duties as a councillor". No doubt he's hoping for a thumping majority next time round.

ROAD WORKS AHEAD

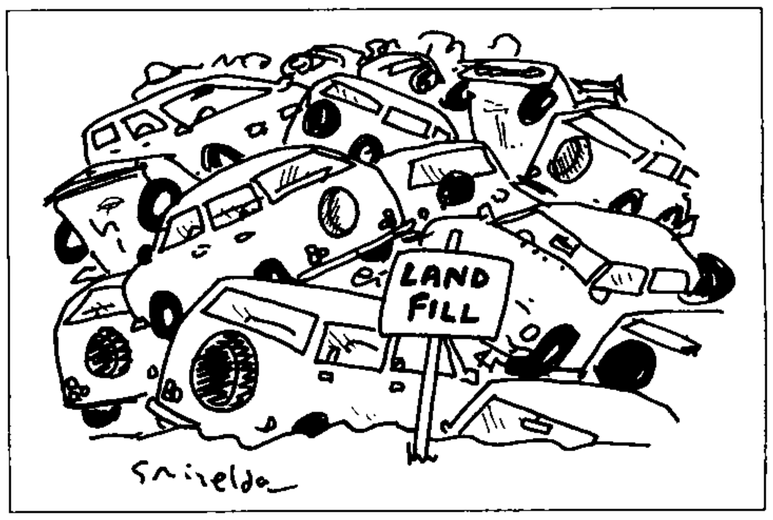
DODGY deals over a road scheme that left five senior officials suspended in the wake of illegal contractual arrangements have done nothing to slow Isle of Wight council's rush to sign up to a PFI to repair the Island's crumbling 500 miles of roads.

"We are fully committed to delivering this PFI project to an exceptional standard," declares Tory council leader Andy Sutton. Also fully committed is an estimated £322m of taxpayers' cash, which based on experience of such projects elsewhere, may yet be several times that before the 25-year scheme is up.

IoW chief executive Joe "Vera" Duckworth may already be regretting his contribution to the rose-tinted 18-page PFI bid document, where he gushes: "To support the delivery of this project we are fortunate to already have in place experienced and respected engineering, technical and financial officers." Such as bid signatories Derek Rowell (described as director of regeneration and development) and head of engineering services and PFI project director Stephen Matthews, both of whom have since been suspended over the aforesaid dodgy deals (*Eyes passim*). And the financial wizardry? He must mean finance director Paul Wilkinson, who is also, er, suspended.

NAPPY RASH

EYE reader Dave Burns, of Hertford, was delighted to receive a cheque for £40 from East Hertfordshire district council for signing up to the "Nappy Cash-Back" initiative run by the council on behalf of the national WasteAware partnership, which dishes out millions of pounds of taxpayers' dosh to citizens who sign a pledge to forswear the use of evil disposable nappies – of which eight million are thrown away daily, comprising 4 percent of household waste. Mr Burns tells the *Eye*: "I think it is fantastic that the council has

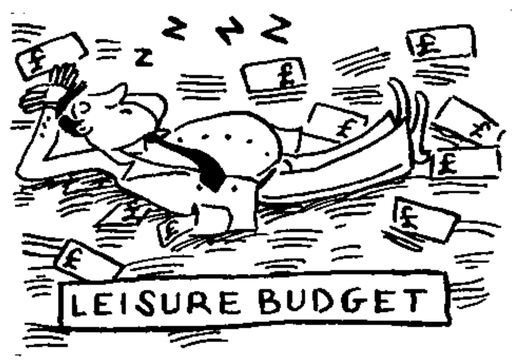


sent me this money, without my having filled in a single form – especially as I don't have any kids." He plans to spend his windfall on "vindaloo and lager". Bottoms up!

LOAD OF BULLOCKS

FOR MORE than two years a battle has raged in the London borough of Lewisham over where a new secondary school should be built. Labour Mayor Steve Bullock wanted it built on the site of the Ladywell leisure centre, in the south of the borough. Opponents argued that the leisure centre, including a popular swimming pool, should be saved and that the need for a new school was greatest at the other side of the borough.

Last May's elections in Ladywell ward were dominated by the issue. Three Green party candidates, who pledged to fight to save the pool, defeated the ward's three Labour councillors, who wanted it demolished to make way for the school. On election night, with the votes counted, Bullock declared: "I will not be changing my mind. We need a new school. Ladywell is the best place for it." By November, however, Bullock had changed his mind. The pool would stay open, he said. The new school would be built at Lewisham Bridge: "This is the result I was always striving for. I feel the passionate and enthusiastic campaign by Save Ladywell Pool is a great example of how local people can get their views heard." Bullock's about-turn was so abrupt that copies of *Time Out* magazine were still on sale in which he was quoted as saying: "The campaign to Save Ladywell Pool is pathetic. It is led by a very small group of backward-looking people."



Unfortunately for Bullock the decision to build the new school at Lewisham Bridge has now provoked another fierce local backlash, with opponents of the development claiming that the school is not needed and is not being built far enough north in the borough, where large housing developments have been given the green light. Recent well-attended public meetings have seen unanimous votes against the latest proposal. Some people are never satisfied...

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

MAKING THIS FILM WAS A REAL JOURNEY FOR US. IT WAS QUIN'S IDEA TO ADD SUBTITLES – DUBBING IS SO MULTIPLEX...
YES, BUT IT WAS YOUR IDEA TO GO BLACK AND WHITE, JEZ – GENIUS!
Le Septième Anniversaire de Lotte
MOVE OVER TRUFFAUT...
WHIRR WHIRR
THERE ARE NEW 'AUTEURS' ON THE BLOCK!

UP THE POLL

AFTER Northampton borough council chief executive Mairi McLean left the council's employment with a secret payoff which was rumoured to be not unadjacent to £385,000, the local Chronicle and Echo newspaper invited its readers to take part in a phone poll on whether details of the deal should have been made public. Somewhat surprisingly, nearly 70 per cent of those who took part apparently thought the deal should be kept secret. Further investigation, however, revealed that most of those votes had come from just four telephones, with nearly half (30 calls) coming from the two phones in the home of the Tory deputy leader of the council, David Palethorpe. Most of the rest came from the Tories' local HQ and the office of Conservative press officer Justin Gleich. Just fancy that!

NOOKS and CORNERS

SOME readers may think I bang on too much about the Curse of the 2012 Olympic Games, but now comes news that the government is to filch a further £90m from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the £12bn (and rising) bill for this vainglorious spectacle that nobody in Britain asked for and nobody (in my doubtless limited acquaintance) wants.

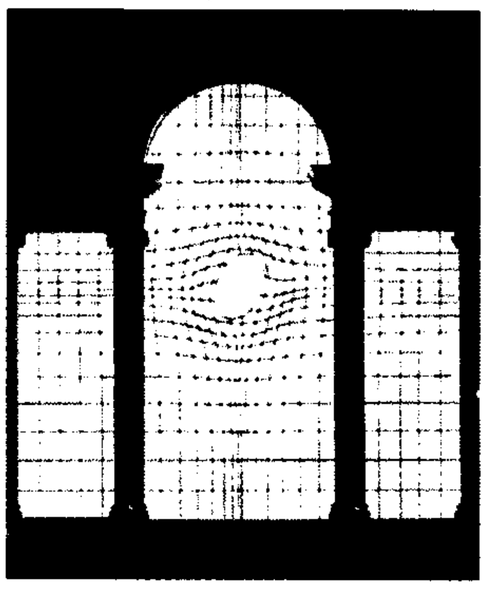
The repair of historic buildings, town centres and other cultural projects have had to rely more and more on the HLF as other budgets are squeezed. The amount now to be stolen represents the HLF's planned spend on such projects for four years. When this raid is combined with Tessa Jowell's reduction of English Heritage's budget, it is clear that there will be little money to look after historic buildings for at least five years (and no doubt beyond, as the Olympics will leave a huge debt). When maintenance is deferred, buildings deteriorate and the ultimate cost is greater – or the buildings disappear. But it is now clear that New Labour cares not a jot for the historic environment and its contribution to our national life. They don't even care about the quality of new architecture – don't forget that Chancellor Brown is the architect of the disastrous private finance initiative to secure new buildings – but are smugly satisfied with large and pretentious sports stadia.

My opposition to the Olympics is not based on hatred of sport. I am in favour of more sports facilities – for everyone, all over the country. But only a few well-connected architects, building contractors and consultants will benefit from the legacy of Lea Valley infrastructure. It will make no difference to the lives of obese teenagers in, say, Oldham, or of violently bored youths in Peckham. For decades now local authorities have been selling off playing fields and closing swimming pools on the grounds that they are too expensive (*Eye* 1156). Despite – or perhaps because of – the Olympics, this continues. Yet a fraction of the budget being squandered on the Games would surely enable us to meet Sport England's objective of one swimming pool for every 30,000 people within 15 minutes' walk (in cities). It could also ensure the repair of the many Victorian and Edwardian pools that are so often scandalously neglected. Is it really too late to cancel the bloody Olympics?

I AM AMUSED to learn that South Lakeland District Council is wondering whether to demolish the exciting new Berners Pool at Grange-over-Sands rather than spend more than £900,000 on repairs. This pool and community centre cost £3.5m, some of it coming from Sport England, and opened in 2003. It won an award from RIBA but was closed by the operator last summer. The closure was blamed on rising energy costs but there were also "problems" with the building, which had never received its completion certificate; it was then damaged by storms over the winter.

The Berners Pool was designed by Hodder Associates of Manchester – that is, by the thrusting, ambitious High Tec architect Stephen Hodder, who, readers may recall, was also responsible for the Clissold Leisure Centre in the London Borough of Hackney (Eye 1114). That whizzy, exciting swimming pool (which replaced six local pools) opened in 2002 and closed after a few months. Acrimonious litigation followed – between client, architect and engineer – which has now been resolved. But the pool remains closed, five years on. Why is it that obscure Victorian municipal architects could design perfectly good and useful swimming pools that survive in use for a century, often despite inadequate maintenance, when high-profile modern architects seem unable to design a pool that can stay open for more than a few years?

THE FAMOUS church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, in Trafalgar Square, is to have a new east window (pictured). James Gibbs's grand early 18th century building is being restored and its facilities enlarged as part of the Renewal Project being conducted by Eric Parry Architects, which is all fine and dandy. Less so, perhaps, is what is proposed to replace the present admittedly banal coloured glass in the east window.



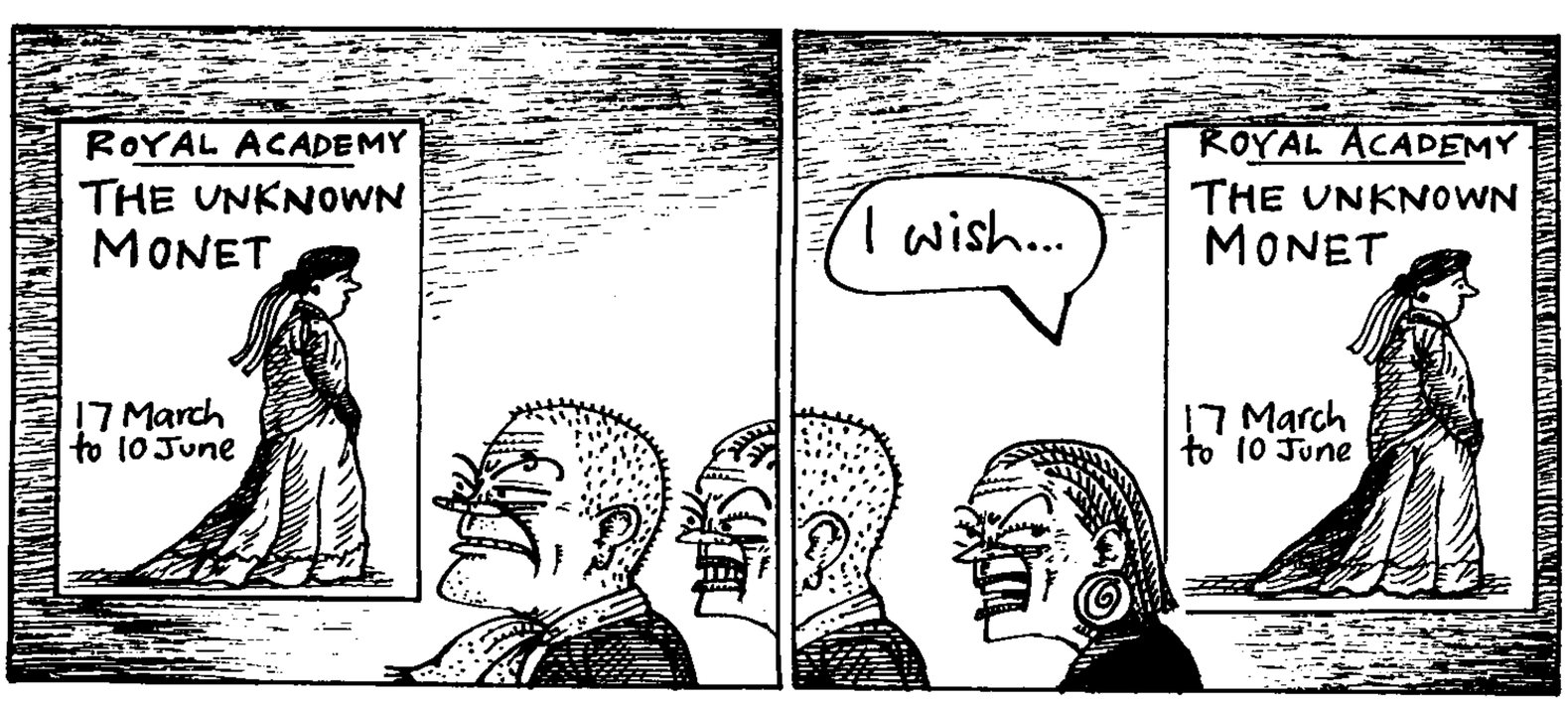
A committee of the cultural great and good has chosen the design by Shirazeh Houshiary, working with the architect Pip Horne. This, we learn, "celebrates light: a monochromatic abstract design, it has strong religious, spiritual and architectural resonances. The 'warp and weft' design of the bronze framework or 'cames' evokes the agony on the Cross, while the central ellipse creates an icon of contemplation. Houshiary is interested in Christian symbols that are also universal. Her design can be read as the light at the centre of existence … the glory of God and of the light with which he illuminates our lives; it can be seen as a face without a face, a universal symbol that transcends cultures." It can also be interpreted as a void, mere emptiness, a complete absence of coherent ideas – and of funk by her clients about commissioning legible Christian symbolism. Yes, yes, we can see the cross shape, but the oval blob just looks like a hole, as if it has melted. As for the notion that the design "echoes" the shape of the window, what is conspicuous is that the banal grid of cames bears no relation whatever to Gibbs's Palladian design.

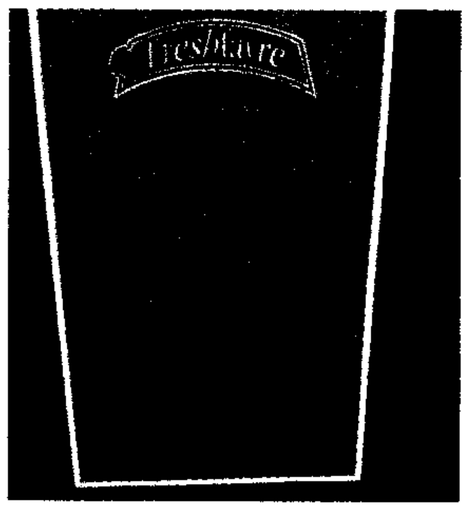
Can they really not do better than this?

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH





I-SPY

Leeds

Submitted by Philip Heppenstall.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs)

MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

DOES Radio 3's controller, Roger Wright, have any friends left?

Life hasn't been too comfortable for him recently, but given the decisive thumbs-down his dismal changes to the schedule have had from listeners and critics alike, he seems to have barricaded himself into a BBC corner with his hands over his ears – refusing to respond to complaints and stifling attempts at public debate.

"I have never before seen so much anger and resentment from the punters," an anonymous BBC insider tells *Classical Music Magazine* in its current issue. "There's a major meltdown going on at Radio 3." And the meltdown in particular concerns Radio 3's online message boards, which were so overwhelmed by protests that they were shut down and reopened on restricted, ruthlessly policed terms.

The new boards do not allow general comments about the station, and any attempt to make one – on programming policy, presentation style, or Wright himself – is immediately excised. Only comments directly related to one of four specific programmes, or to jazz coverage, will be entertained.

The Friends of Radio 3 pressure group is furious. "It's draconian," says the Friends spokeswoman, "and has all the horrendous connotations of censorship, of gagging people, and that for the BBC is pretty serious. Some [topic] threads – the notion that Radio 3 is in trouble because of the schedule changes, that people are unhappy – are entirely removed. Post after post gets hidden. We're the people paying for Radio 3 and we're not allowed to express an opinion on the boards that are supposed to be fostering interactivity."

Wright argues that the restrictions fall in line with wider BBC strategy. But that's nonsense: no other BBC station limits its message boards in this way. Indeed most encourage free and general discussion – only Radio 3 bans it.

Not that the ban has left message boards free of criticism. Listeners have made the most of their limited rights of complaint to savage new shows such as the Sunday morning Iain Burnside slot. Meanwhile, the most telling excision concerned a brief attempt to post a discussion about "censorship at the BBC" – which lasted all of five minutes before the red pen moved in.

All this begs the question of how much longer Roger Wright can last, under siege as he now is. With the announcement that Nick Kenyon is to leave the Proms and take over John Tusa's job at the Barbican, there's a general belief that Wright will be shifted sideways to become the new Proms boss. A view too general, of course, for airing on the message boards.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

VOICE
A Circle of songs
A programme of songs for female vices from different times, styles and places.
What's On, Farringdon

Letters

Record savings

Sir,

Can I claim one-third of the NHS blown IT budget for solving one third of the problem? Give every patient their medical record just like we do for women in maternity services. They get their records to appointments far more often than the NHS does. It's cheap – all those medical records departments can be shut – and it's quick. We could start today.

BELINDA PHIPPS,

National Childbirth Trust.

Pharma's friend?

Sir,

Your excellent article on electronic medical records (Eye 1179) expresses puzzlement on the question "What are they for?". An April 1999 copy of the journal Science sheds some light. In it, scientists from SmithKline Beecham (now Glaxo SmithKline) argue that the NHS has an obligation to act as a research resource for poor resource-stretched big pharma, by providing access to electronic medical records linked to stored blood samples and DNA.

The soon-to-be launched UK Biobank project, which will seek DNA from half a million people and link it with their electronic medical records, is one outcome of this proposal. Like the electronic records themselves, UK Biobank has been much delayed, largely because geneticists have criticised it as useless from a scientific point of view. In evidence to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee in 2000, Sir John Pattison of the Department of Health described the biobank thus: "The strategy, of course, is not to go to a national genetic database as a first step, the strategy is to join the MRC [Medical Research Council] and the Wellcome Trust in assembling a large cohort of approximately half a million people...". Pattison is, as you report, the man later charged with drawing up the NHS electronic records plan.

Any resemblance between the national genetic database to which Pattison refers and the national genetic database advocated by our dear leaders for surveillance purposes is, of course, entirely co-incidental.

Yours faithfully,
DR HELEN WALLACE,

Director, GeneWatch UK, Buxton, Derbyshire.

Special offer

Sir,

You mention in 'IT for purpose' (Eye 1180) that EDS was bunged £700 million to supply 44,000 computers. That comes to £15,900 each. I can arrange to supply several thousand PCs for only £5,000 each. I can buy them in any high street for well under £1,000. Is this what the Dear Leader means by value for money?

Yours,
MIKE EMERY,

Via email.

Sound of Silence

Sir,

Remarkable lookalike, Garfunkel vs McGuinness, but the dogs in the street know McGuinness didn't "sing".

Yours sincerely,
CORMAC A. FARNAN,

Ballycastle.

Paisley prince

Sir,

In your article on Ms Wade's enthusiasm for publishing Mad Dog Adair's memoirs you suggest that her motivation is "to gain support from the Paisleyite hordes in the north". The hordes have recently descended on the polling stations and have failed to elect one individual who has a terrorist record. This is in stark contrast to the array of convicted murderers, bank robbers and bombers they will face across the chamber. To understand Adair's standing in the community, think Kray brothers without their level of popular support. So why do you think Ms Wade would gain support from Paisley (peace be upon him) or his supporters by publication of Adair's memoirs? You are the only publication to suggest that Adair had any chance of election had he not been returned to prison.

Who feeds you these nasty, misleading, sectarian one-liners that pepper so much of your Ulster coverage, and why do you continue to print them?

You are in danger of making Ms Wade appear, in comparison, a responsible journalist – surely some mistake.

PETER FREEMAN,

Bangor, Co. Down.

Lookalike

Hitler

Mugbe

Sir,

I find it very disturbing that the western media always portray Robert Mugabe as a vile dictator in the mold of Adolf Hitler. This can only be as a result of racial bias because in reality there is clearly no similarity between the two.

Regards,
MARTIN WELLARD,

Via email.

Turkey towers

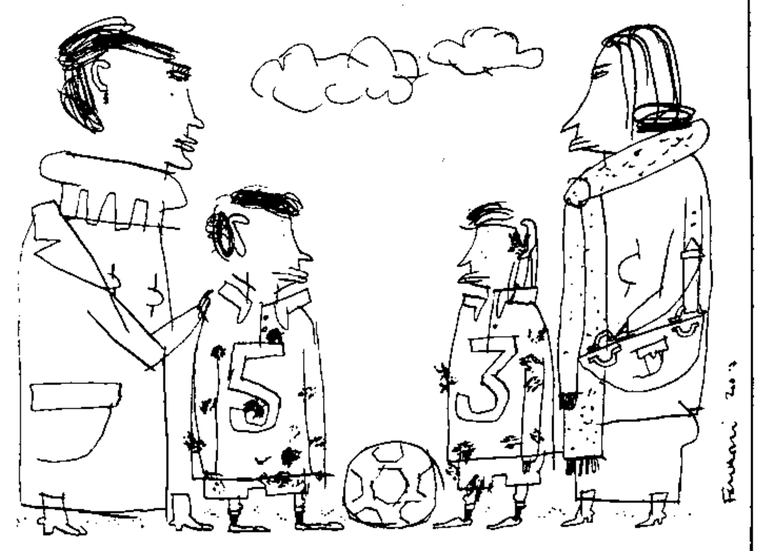
Sir,

Bernard Matthews did rear turkeys in the rooms of Wychingham Hall before moving them out to turkey houses. At a lecture in the '80s Mr Matthews confirmed this and also said that after they were moved out, the turkeys were replaced by, yes, you've got it, accountants!

DONOVAN NOBLE,

Grange-over-Sands.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Your little boy played a lot better than my little boy"

Dobb-in Defra

Sir,

If what Muckspreader reported in Eye 1180 is kosher, re the desperate plight of David Dobbin and his herd of cows, then DEFRA and all its officials responsible should be more than ashamed, they should be summarily sacked. It beggars belief!

I am a born and bred countryman who had the misfortune to be involved in the F&M outbreak in 1967 (I worked for MAFF, who back then knew about farming) and this sorry tale has all the hallmarks of a complete and utter cock-up by the suits in Defra. There were no suits in MAFF in my day. We wore wellies and got muck on our boots. Oh, and the likes of Mr Dobbin were our friends!

Bloody shower!

PAUL WHITE,

Via email.

Hands-on experience

Sir,

I note your commendable concern for the wellbeing of Ming Campbell should he, on a warm day, encounter no-knickers Page 3 girl and Lib Dem councillor Marina Pepper (Rotten Boroughs, Eye 1180). Have you perchance in your files any depiction of an experienced Lib Dem MP dealing with a comparably fortunate meeting?

Yours faithfully,
BOB HEYS,

Ripponden, Halifax.

Right morons

Sir,

Dr Greg Spicer's memories of the Federation of Conservative Students (issue 1180) differ from mine. As a mature student at UCW Aberystwyth in the late 1980s, I may have been a lefty. But the shock of seeing FCS students parading around campus in Springbok jerseys (to show their support for apartheid in South Africa), I could just about dismiss as the excesses of a bunch of morons just coming out of adolescence. However, when they racially abused a barman at the Students Union and then went on the town in order to celebrate Hitler's rise to power, then the vast majority of students backed the idea of "no platform for racist and fascist" and these morons were banned from the student facilities. I wonder what they are doing now?

Yours sincerely,
GLYN MORRIS,

Pontypridd.

"Blackberry Enterprise Solution 4.1 for Blackberry wireless communications solution" – *mobile emailer software*

"LexJet product solutions for inkjet printers" – *ink and paper*

"SirsiDynix: the world leader in Strategic Technology Solutions for Libraries" – *catalogues*

"JDP offers total solutions in water management systems" – *drains*

"Sony Digital Imaging Solutions" – *cameras*

"British Turntable – providing movement solutions to industry worldwide since 1959" – *turntables*

All submitted by readers

"Doing anything special for Easter?"

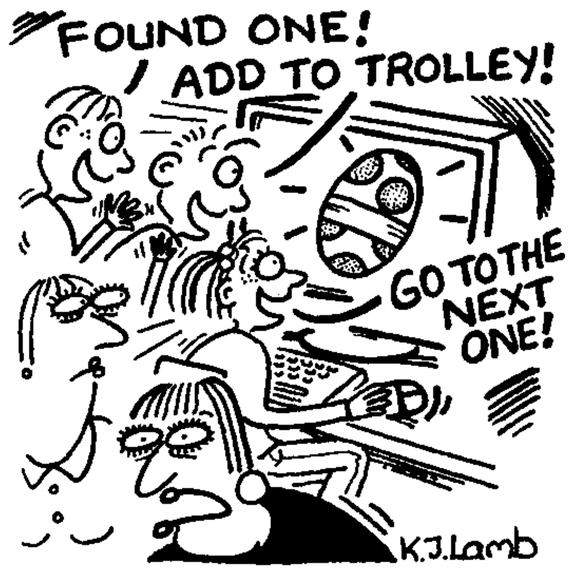
Chavasse memorial

Sir,

Piloti is right to mourn the loss of the name Chavasse from the centre of Liverpool. Not only was Captain Chavasse a holder of the VC and Bar, he was the only person who served in the First World War to be awarded the VC twice. For those Liverpudlians who wish to continue to remember him, he is buried at Brandhoek New Military Cemetery just outside Ypres. There is also a memorial plaque to him on Brandhoek church, funded by the inhabitants of Brandhoek village.

Bishop Chavasse had two other sons serving in the Ypres sector, Capt Francis Chavasse MC and Lt Aidan Chavasse. Lt Aidan was posted missing in action in July 1917, and is listed on the Menin Gate in the centre of Ypres itself.

Yours faithfully,
IAN JOHNSON,
Grayrigg, nr Kendal, Cumbria.



"It's different from the Easter egg hunts which I remember"

Allez les faux pas!

Sir,

Millions of people must be recoiling in horror that the original figure presented to the Olympic Committee in Singapore in 2005 has now quadrupled to £9 billion (and still rising!?).

If we backtrack to the eve of the voting for the venue of the 2012 Olympics we find that Paris and London were almost joint favourites to win this Olympic "millstone". A certain perceptive person must have thought, "How can I divert this award away from the people of Paris and France and save them from this enormous imposition without seeming to oppose the bid." That same person then made stupid comments about British and Finnish cooking which seem to achieve the object of swinging a majority of votes in favour of London.

I can't quite remember the name of this person, although I believe he was a Frenchman and his name rhymes with "Shellac".

Regards,
NORMAN BURNARD,
Pickering, N. Yorks.

"We are demonised – being seen to support Mr Le Pen in public is still taboo," said Evelyne Ruty at the National Front offices on Rue Bigot.

Grauniad

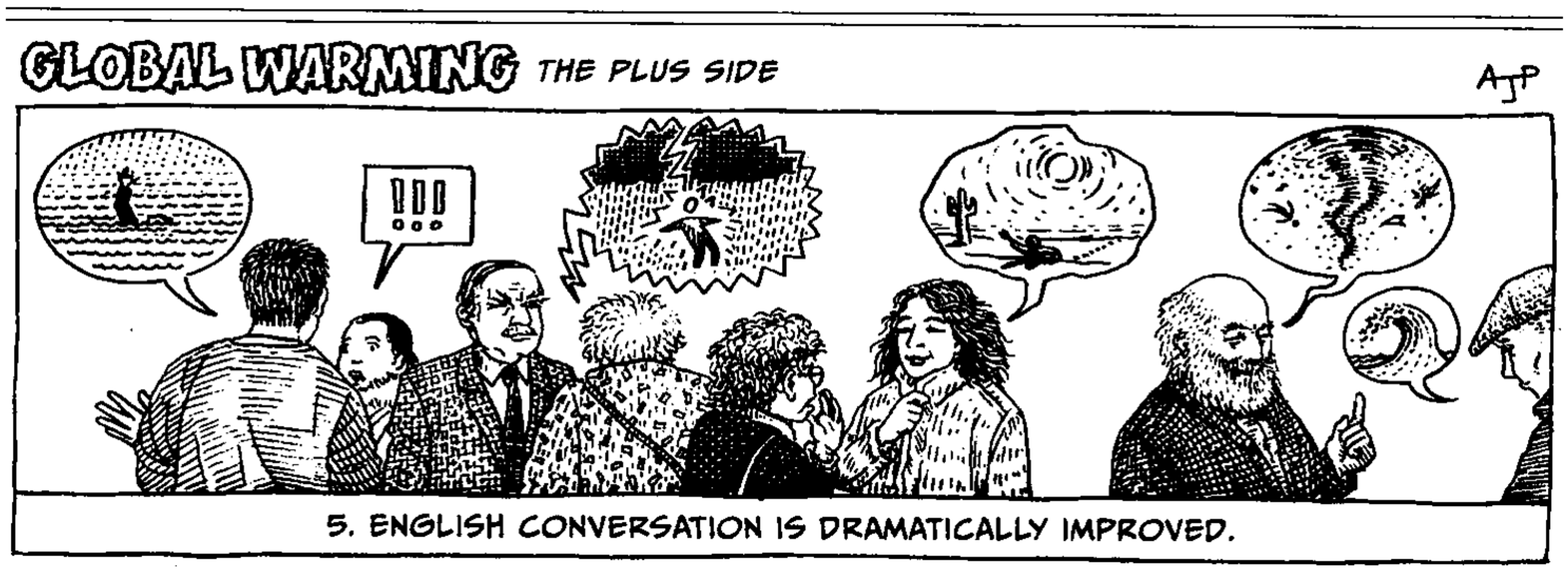
LUVVIES

"I'd come home from work virtually every day, and burst into tears for no reason at all."

LUCY-JO HUDSON on her time in Coronation Street

Submitted by Joseph Brewer.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.



Pedants Corner

Sir,

As Street Of Shame points out in Eye 1180, there are no references to Christianity in Deuteronymy. This is probably because there is no such book. It is, of course, also true that there are no references to Christians in Deuteronomy.

All it really means is The Second Book of Laws.

RICHARD PLOWDEN.

... Very amused by the report on Roy Williams's "Days of Significance" (Eye 1180, p. 9) but puzzled as to why "five bollocks" is "an odd number" whereas "three tits" isn't.

Or do you know something we don't?

DAVID MILLER.

... Pace Roderick Thomson (Letters, Eye 1180), there is no such word as "jejeune". However, I am interested by this perfect example of folk etymology.

"Jejune" (sic) is derived from the Latin jejunus, meaning "hungry". Until fairly recently it was used to mean "sparse" or "empty", but it is increasingly taking on connotations of immaturity, and I predict that within decades the original spelling of the word will have gone the way of its original definition.

EMILY MORRIS.

... People who write or read letters to the Eye about the works of Tolien should be aware that the end of the Silmarillion declares "the lies of Melkor sprout anew unto the latest days". Perhaps that is why everyone who tries to correct everyone else largely misses the point, which is that Tolkien, as part of his moralising technique, deliberately leaves whole chunks of the pre-history in his works as inferences or deductions or "lost secrets" to make us think, so they cannot truly be corrected at all.

For Mr Paul Seedhouse, who is the latest. It is indeed deduced that Malkor made Orcs from Elves, and that Saruman blended a few with men, though nowhere is it specifically confirmed. On the other hand, I cannot find that Melkor was Master of Middle-Earth (only of Angband in the North); or that he made any fell beasts of the sea; or that Saruman was his underling (Saruman was one of the Wizards sent to contest Sauron, by whom he seems to have let himself be caught and given wild ideas when foolishly probing the seeing-stone, but those ideas centred around eventually gaining control himself); or that Uruks were any more than just large Orcs (not blends, though they could stand light); or that the blends were any more vicious (just stronger). Melkor may have served ages (not aeons), but he is banished for ever, perhaps this correspondence (and Jade Goody) should be as well.

MICHAEL OAKLEY.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"They [Scotland] are staring down the barrel of a wooden spoon."
WILL GREENWOOD, Radio 5 Live
(Dean Wykes)

"Middlesbrough have turned the tide of the game on its head."
JONATHAN PIERCE
(Joseph Wade)

"Now it's time to draw a line under the sand..."
PAT MURPHY, Radio 5 Live
(Matt Cooper)

"If Rick Barnhill wins this, it'll be a real scalp in his cap."
WILL VANDERS, Euro Sport
(Steve Turner)

"I'm not saying he's going to field a weaker team; it just won't be as strong."
MARK LAWRENSON, Radio 5 Live
(Mark Fieldhouse)

Letter from **Turkmenistan**

from Our Own Correspondent

IN OUR dusty capital, Ashgabat, stands a golden statue of our Glorious Leader Turkmenbashi, Father of all Turkmen, rotating non-stop so that he always faces the sun, arms aloft. It is hard for us five million Turkmen to face the reality that Saparmurat Niyazov is no longer with us.

Who, we asked ourselves, could fill the shoes of this colossus who left us last year? Who will lock up the political dissidents and win elections by at least 99 percent? What will become of our industries devoted to the creation of statues and palaces in his image? Where will we be able to stock up on supplies of his own-brand aftershave and literary masterpiece, the *Book of the Soul*? Oh, and what is to become of our extraordinarily large reserves of natural gas, penned in as we are between Iran and Afghanistan and courted by Russia, China and the US?

Step forward the one and only Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, our new president and heir to the Niyazov throne. A former dentist with a noticeable absence of gold teeth, Gurbanguly has the ideal credentials: he comes from the same tribe as the Great Leader and bears an uncanny resemblance to him; he was also a loyal lieutenant, serving as health minister when Niyazov decreed that most of our hospitals should be closed. Most important of all, Gurbanguly is trusted by our shadowy security bosses – led by Turkmenbashi's former chief bodyguard Akmurat Rejepov – who rallied together to fill the political vacuum left by their master's death. It is a tribute to our political system that the transition has been smooth as silk; Gurbanguly triumphed in elections held in mid-February with a refreshingly modest and modern victory margin of less than 90 percent.

Nobody here doubts that our new leader has the toughest of acts to follow and he will be forced to live in Niyazov's shadow, at least until he gets his own palaces and monuments built. He has, though, made some positive steps – we now have our first-ever internet café – and some political prisoners have been released from solitary confinement and put under house arrest. Gurbanguly has also played the smooth diplomat, making the right noises to foreign dignitaries who pitched up for Niyazov's funeral and were only too happy to shake hands with his successor.

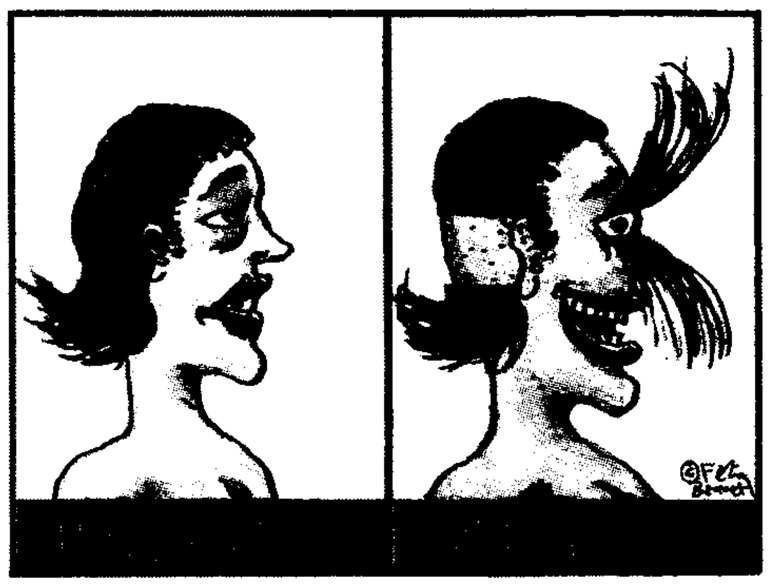
Niyazov, with his relentless demands for financial "incentives", was never an easy partner for our American friends. They may hope for an easier ride now, both for access to places like our airbase at Mary in the south and our gas fields. For Niyazov always believed that the key player in our volatile region was Russia, for the simple reason that it could cause the most trouble and, more important still, was and still is the main transit route for our gas exports. The Great Leader proved to be more than a match for Tsar Putin and his buddies at Russian gas giant Gazprom, which buys most of our gas and assumed – wrongly – that we would continue to charge them knock-down prices. But Moscow got a nasty shock last year when we doubled the prices for our gas, and, after plenty of gnashing of teeth, they were forced to cave in.

The wild card in the pack is Beijing, which regards Central Asia as part of its neighbourhood and wants to build lasting bridges with Turkmenistan, including a huge new gas pipeline that would cost a fortune. Russia and America are looking on nervously as our friend from the East strengthens the bonds of friendship and seeks to become the dominant player in this messy backyard.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "It's fantastic. Eyelash transplantation does for the eyes what breast augmentation does for the figure," Dr Alan J. Bauman told reporters at his clinic in Boca Raton, Florida, "because longer thicker lashes are a ubiquitous sign of beauty. The procedure was originally developed for patients who had suffered burns, but it's now becoming available as a form of cosmetic surgery, and its popularity is going to explode. What we do is to harvest hair follicles from the back of the scalp, then use 'plug and sew' techniques to implant them onto the eyelid. It really is fantastic. We create between 24 and 40 new lashes this way, depending on the size of the eyelid. The procedure takes about three hours under local anaesthetic, and it means that women can now have the long sweeping lashes that were once achievable only by



glued-on extensions and thick coatings of mascara, all for about $3,000 per eyelid. Fantastic."

Earlier, Erica Lynn (a twenty-seven-year-old Fort Lauderdale model) had spoken enthusiastically about her own experience of eyelash surgery. "It has boosted my confidence, because now when people look in my eyes, they really notice. It's life changing, and it's enhanced my career, because eyes are such a focal point of any photo. And when you have big eyelashes, you can get a lot of things by simply batting them. So now I do that a lot more than I ever did before." *(NBC6 News, 16/2/07. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

– ● –

● *What is Fish 'n Flush? It's a patented two-piece aquarium toilet tank, designed by California-based AquaOne Technologies Inc., an innovator of water-management systems. Fitting most two-piece toilets, it turns the bathroom into the center of attention with its unique design of an aquarium that wraps itself around a clear inner tank. It's the ultimate dual-purpose product, serving as a proper fully-functioning tank or cistern, and also as a source of entertainment.*

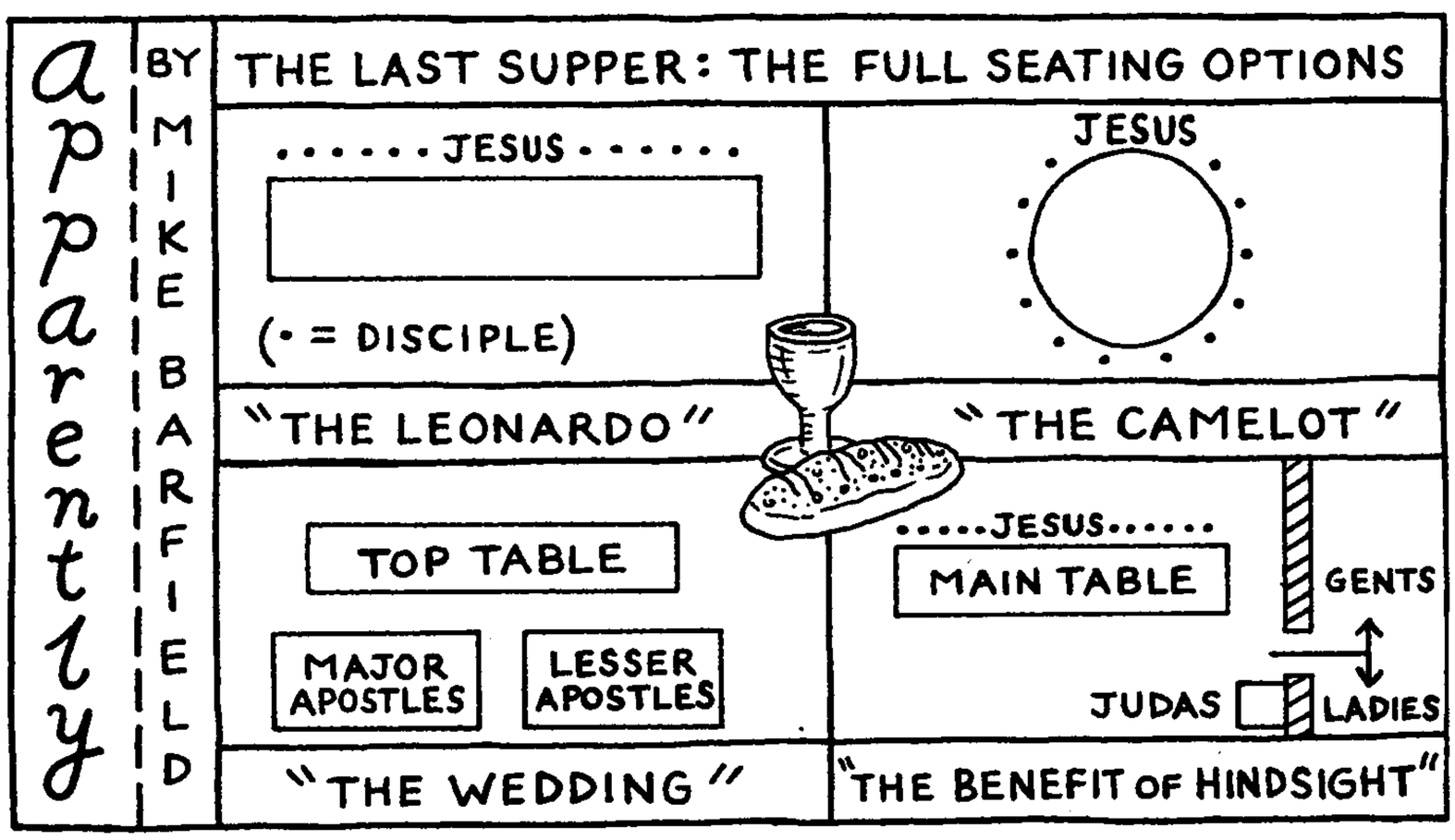
Fish 'n Flush also makes a fun fashion statement for the homeowner who wants to have something unique in the bathroom. It's a great conversation piece that will appeal to most everyone. The toilet tank itself holds 2.5 gallons, which is sufficient for flushing. The aquarium has a 2.2-gallon capacity, which is a convenient size, easy to clean and maintain. Smaller fish are obviously recommended.

The aquarium sells for $299, and has been developed in conjunction with a marine biologist, to ensure that the fish are not harmed. (Advertisement for Fish 'n Flush. Spotter: Lisa Pollini)

– ● –

● "The behaviour of Stalin Avramov is thoroughly irresponsible," a spokesman for Bulgaria's National Electricity Company told reporters in Sofia, "and could ultimately leave the entire country without electricity. The problem is with the Petrohan grid that connects the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant to Sofia, and specifically with pole number 244, which stands on land owned by Mr Avramov. Seven years ago, he constructed a large pond around the pole, and although the local court declared his construction illegal in 2001, he has refused to drain it or remove it. Ever since, water has been slowly eating away at the soil surrounding pole 244, and it is now corroding the 400-kilovolt pole itself. Any day now, it could fall down, and if that happens, the whole of Sofia will be left in the dark, and the country's electricity grid may crash completely."

However, standing outside his restaurant in the northern town of Berkovitsa, Avramov was unrepentant. "I need these breeding ponds to supply fresh fish for my customers. Everyone knows that I serve the freshest and most palatable fish in town. But that makes my rivals jealous, because they can only serve frozen fish to their customers. That's why they are conspiring against me, to try to ruin my business." *(Sofia Morning News, 1/3/07. Spotter: David Ordman)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And yet again we are approaching the great festival of Easter, when our thoughts naturally turn to one of the greatest acts of betrayal in history.

But Judas, of course, was not the only person who has betrayed his rightful leader.

We see similar examples of it it right up to the present day, and even here in our own parish.

Surely not, Vicar, I hear you say! But yes, it's sad but true.

There are times when we can't even rely on those who have worked closely with us in positions of trust. You'll all know who I have in mind! Mr Turnbull may not have received the traditional "thirty pieces of silver". But his description of our beloved Treasurer Mr Brown as a "dour, embittered Scottish control freak and psychopath, worse than Stalin" must go down as one of the most unforgivable acts of betrayal that any of us on the PCC can remember.

After all, Mr Turnbull had for many years worked alongside Mr Brown, in good times and bad.

Mr Brown, showing his human side (!) at the annual children's fancy dress party held in the Parish Hall (as seen by local artist Mr de la Nouegerede)

In all those hours they spent together, poring over the parish accounts until far into the night, Mr Turnbull got to know Mr Brown pretty well!

Indeed, there are probably few people in the parish who know Mr Brown better!

They say that sometimes your colleagues at work get to know you better than your own family!

And, hey, this could be a case in point!

So if, after all those years working across the desk from each other, Mr Turnbull thinks that Mr Brown is an evil tyrant, well, who are we to argue with him?

But surely, I hear you ask, he should have kept his feelings to himself!

He may have thought those things, but loyalty should have kept him silent.

Fair point! But aren't there times when things are going so badly and someone is behaving so atrociously that it becomes a

duty to speak out!

I mean, if you thought that someone in your workplace – be it in the factory or the office – was hopelessly ill-suited for the promotion for which he had been angling for years, and was treating his colleagues with utter contempt, what would you do?

I am not saying that Mr Turnbull was right! But he certainly wasn't wrong, was he?

Let's be honest, it showed great courage to speak out as he did! So let's not have any silly parallels between this good, brave man and Judas Iscariot. Oh dear, no.

If there's a Judas in our midst, then some of us may not have to look any further than our nextdoor neighbour!

It's not often that I argue with the Good Book, but, frankly, that bit about "love thy neighbour" must have been a mistranslation of the original Greek!

If you go back to the original Aramaic, you'll find that the word is "granita", which actually means not "love", but "keep a very close eye on him because he's up to no good"!

Yours (still!),

Tony

Parish Profile No.1

(of one)

It gives me great pleasure to introduce readers to a very promising young man who is currently taking the PCC by storm as the choir-boys' delegate. David may be very young (he's only 16) but, my goodness, he makes up for this with bags of enthusiasm and charm. And he's got a wise old head on a pair of young shoulders! What a very good vicar David would *(or should I say "will"?!)* make when the time comes. Mr Mandelson even thinks he would do better as vicar than our current treasurer Mr Brown. Well, I wouldn't go that far, but he's obviously right. I mean, just think about it – if you had the choice between a delightful, young sixth-former and a grumpy, middle-aged man who can't do his sums – hey, it's not much of a contest is it? T.B.

The Vicar's Text Of The Week

"Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called Tony"

Book of Legacies, Chapter One, Verse One.

● **Vicar's note: This obviously applies to places like Ireland and not, of course, Iraq and Iran – though with the similarity in spelling, it's an easy mistake to make!! T.B.**

Human Rights In Saudi Arabia

Mrs Cherie Booth writes:

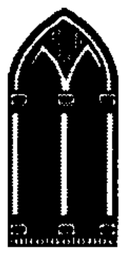
The Saudi Government are making giant strides towards freedom of speech and equal opportunities for men and women (provided that they are foreigners). As the wife of the Vicar, I was completely free to give a talk about anything I liked and my Saudi hosts were equally free to give me £25,000 in return, provided I didn't upset anyone. So don't let's hear any more about the so-called repressive regime in Saudi Arabia!

Cherie Booth Q.C.

■ *Thanks for that, Cherie. It's really given us something to think about during Lent.*

£ £

Parish Accounts



As you all know, Mr Brown once again presented our annual accounts in the parish hall. As usual, he gave us a very comprehensive review of everything he has been up to during the year and gave us a preview of his plans for the next financial year. It was certainly very complicated, and I fear that some of us may have nodded off after an hour or two (Mr Prescott will know who I am referring to! His new duties are doubtless very tiring! Or perhaps he's been "getting his wallet out", getting ready for the croquet season!). Anyway, I'm sorry to say there isn't room to reprint any of it here. Copies can be obtained from Mr Brown - if you are really desperate - price 2p! T.B.

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

WHO KILLED BOB WOOLMER?

We don't know.

Full story: Pages 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 94

New Compassionate Tories

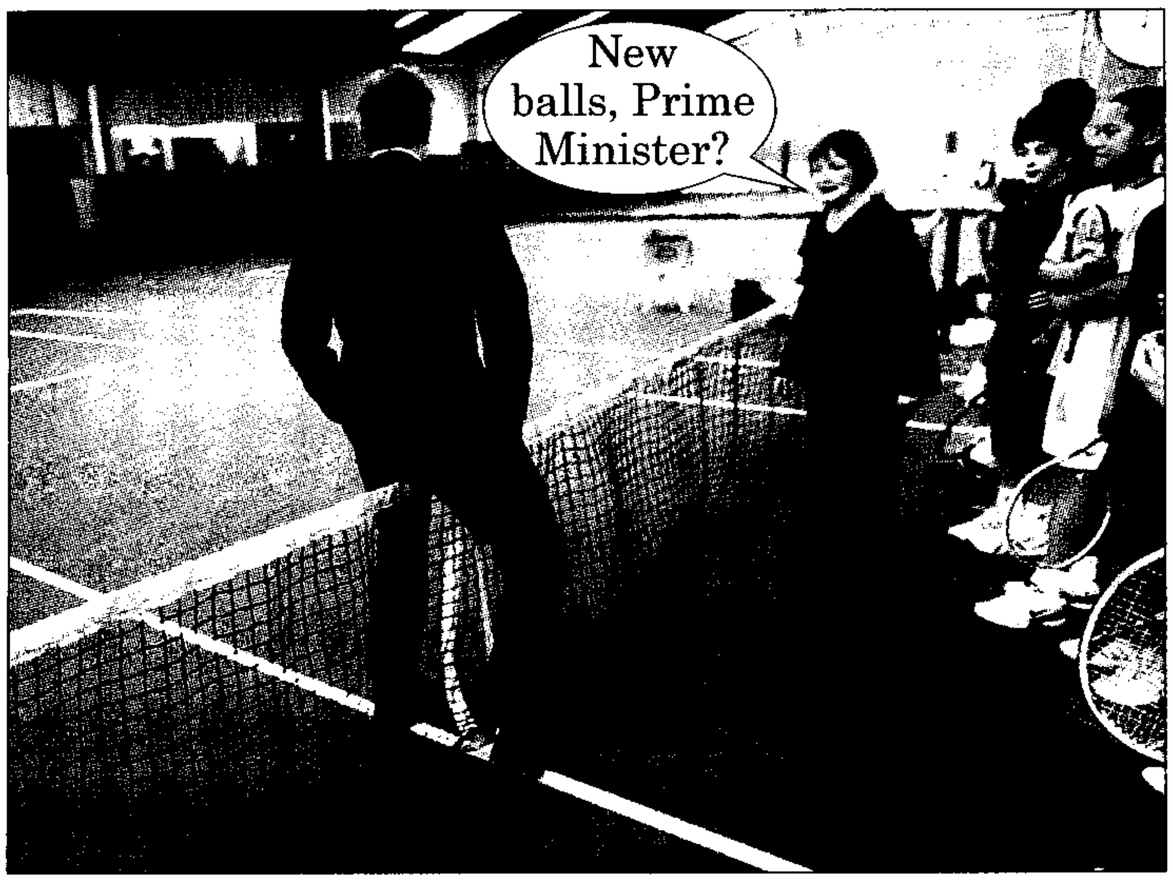
BLAIR WARNS IRAN OVER CAPTURED SAILORS

by Our Diplomatic Staff **Naim Ayatollah**

THE PRIME Minister issued a stern warning last night to the Iranian government following the capture of 15 British servicemen in the disputed waters of the Iran/Iraq sea.

Said Mr Blair, "This whole thing is very unfortunate and I take it very seriously." He told the Iranian ambassador, "I am sending Mrs Beckett in her caravan to ensure that this crisis is speedily resolved."

The forthcoming talks were described as "frank but pointless".



SOLDIER HONOURED

by Our Military Correspondent **Victoria Cross**

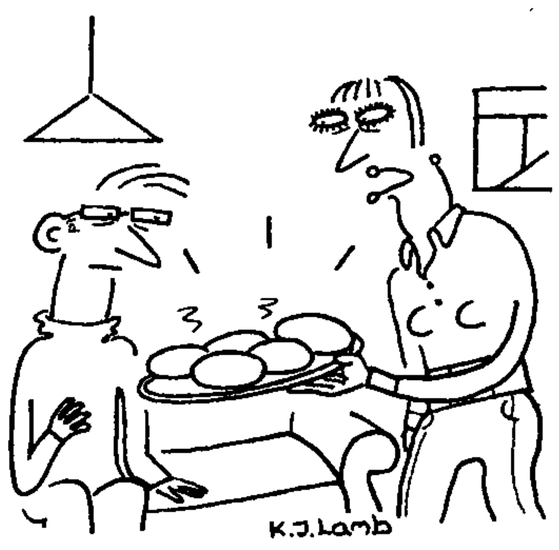
LIEUTENANT Harry Windsor of the Booze & Royals Regiment is to receive one of the highest military honours, The Order of the Seven Vodkas, following an engagement in the early hours at the notoriously dangerous enemy encampment at Boujis.

Says the citation: "The unarmed Lieutenant Windsor single handedly attacked an enemy snapper who was carrying a fully loaded Nikon automatic. Lt Windsor pursued the enemy beyond the call of nature whilst the snapper took several shots at him.

Windsor bravely ran forward shouting obscenities and grappled with his assailant, giving his all

before collapsing fatally drunk into the gutter. He was later dragged to safety by members of the elite royal minder squad."

The citation concludes, "Seldom has a young officer showed such exemplary stupidity. We recommend he be court martialled *(surely shome mistake)*.



"Would you like a hot non-overtly-Christian bun"

POETRY CORNER

Lines on the 50th Anniversary of the European Union

So. The EU
Is 50 years
Old.

All together
Now –

Happy birthday
To EU.

Happy birthday
To EU.

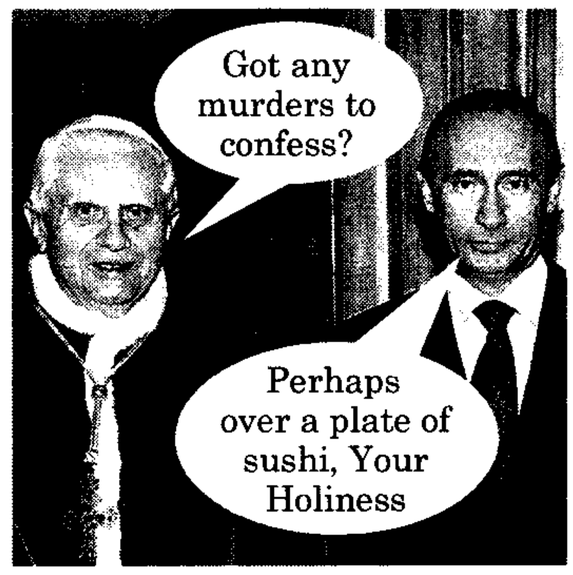
Happy birthday
Dear EU.

Happy birthday
To EU.

Sadly, however, not
Everyone
Wants to join
In.

E.U . Thribb (17½)

POPE MEETS PUTIN



Advertisement

WHITEHALL THEATRE

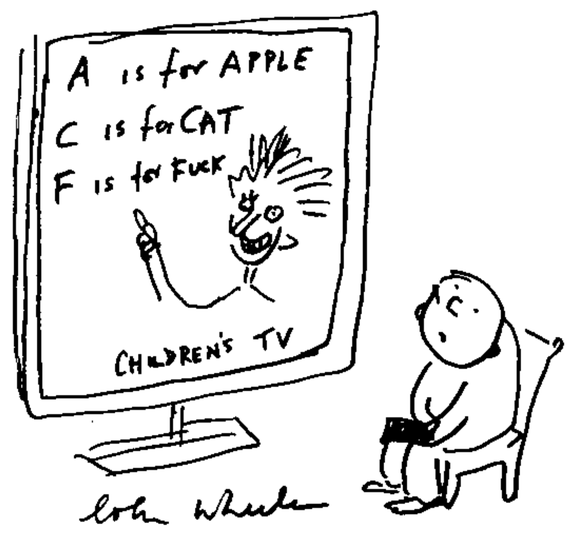
ENNUI PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

Go-ing Go-ing

BY A. BLAIR

WHAT A FARCE!

SEATS FOR CASH IN ALL PARTS!!



A DISGRACE TO CRICKET

by **Phil Glass**, Our Man In The Bar With The Tequila Slammer And The Rum Punch Chaser

DRUNK AND USELESS. There's no other way to describe this lamentable performance by someone who should know better. The sight of a grown man drinking himself into a stupor is not a pretty one.

And the inevitable result of this excess is a woeful display of inaccuracy, sloppiness and sheer lack of professionalism in the most important cricket tournament in the world.

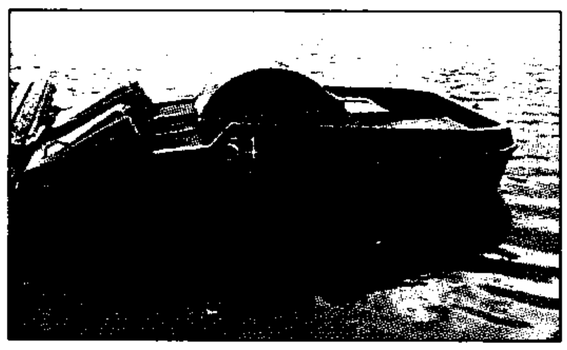
Yes, I can only apologise. I'm drunk and this column is uesless. I've let myself down, my team down and my trousers down. Send me home now.

© All newspapers

THE Sun SAYS

TIME TO CRACK DOWN ON SICK PEDALOS

THESE vile pedalo scum have now infiltrated the world of sport, hoping to lure young cricketers out to sea for their evil purposes (Is this right? Ed). Now we name and shame those evil pedalos who prey on our lads.



Vile: No 78

Do you know of any dangerous pedalos lurking near you? Call our Rebekah on the Pedalo Hotline 0798534787 and we'll organise a group of vigilantes to burn them!

HELLO! BUYS ROONEY WEDDING FOR £1.5M

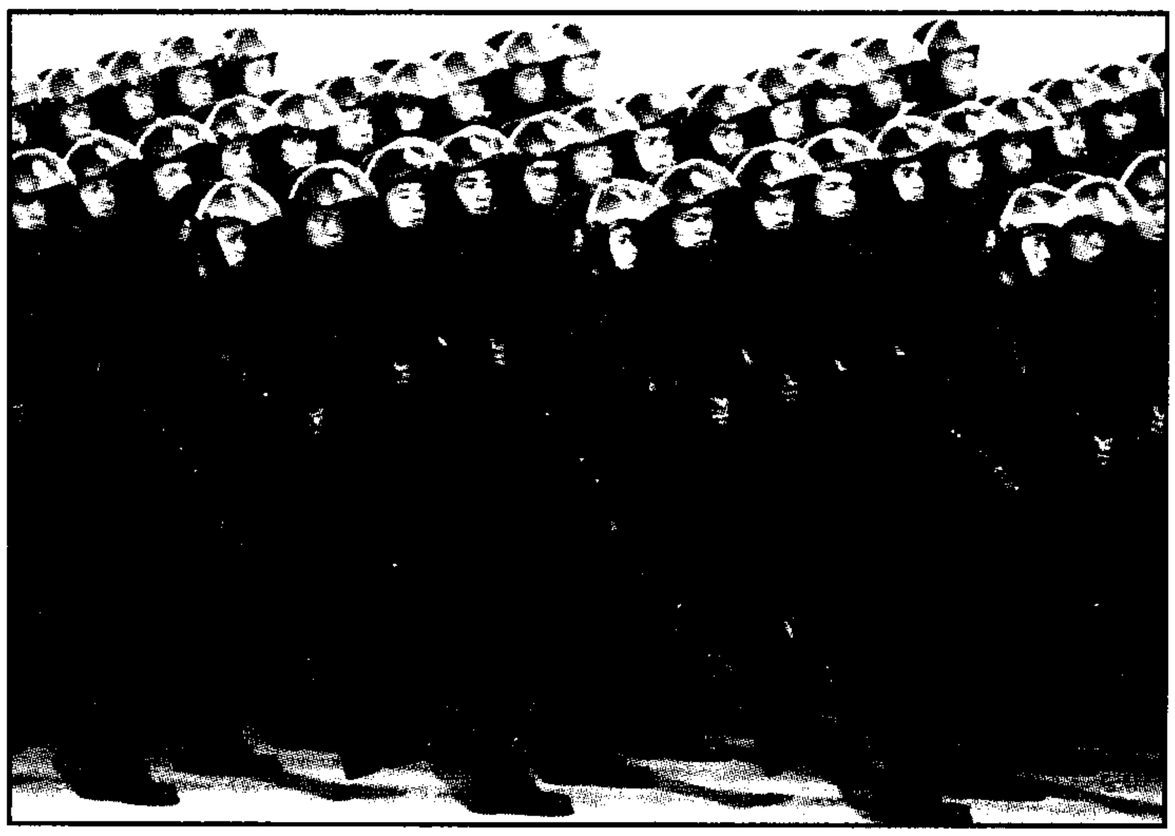
Correction

■ The White House described the Democratic Iraq withdrawal proposals as being "aimed at bringing comity to their internal politics", not comedy as stated in an article on March 9. The word comedy was taken from the original White House transcript which was corrected after we had gone to press.

Financial Times

NEW OLYMPIC EVENT

China's 200m Synchronised Baton Charge Team in training



"We can beat anybody!"

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S WICKED MAIDEN! (GEDDIT?!)

■ **FREDDIE FLINTOFF!!?! What a disgrace!!?? No wonder England keep getting beaten when Four-X Fred is out all night getting hammered – and I don't mean by Bermuda (Geddit!?). Freddie can't even take out a pedalo without falling into the drink!?! Geddit?!? What must kiddies think when they see their hero a-boozin' and a-losin'??!! Howzatt?! You're out! And about time too!?! Flint-Off Andy!? Geddit?!?**

■ FREDDIE FLINTOFF!!?! What's all the fuss about?! So he likes a drink! Who doesn't?!? He's only human. What sort of country are we when a young lad can't even have a swift pint or two of rum without the stuffed-shirt brigade coming down on him like a ton of bricks!?! Oi, Mr Killjoy – leave our Fred alone!?! If he wants to fall off a pedalo in the middle of the night, good luck to him!?!

■ **DIDYA see the Chancellor's Missus in her mini-skirt and high heels outside No. 11?!? Blimey!!? Who does she think she is – Kate Moss or what?!? Take a tip from Auntie Glenda, sweetheart, stick to the M&S Middleaged Mum range – no offence!?! – and leave the glamour to Cherie Blair!?!**

■ HATS OFF to Gordon's Gorgeous Gal!?! Sarah Brown I'm talkin' about, stoopid!?! Out go the frowsty frocks and sensible shoes from M&S – in come the sassy microskirt and knock 'em dead shoes!?! Eat your heart out, dumpy Cherie Blair!?! No wonder the guys were a-dribblin' and a-scribblin'?!? All together now – "Knees Out Mother Brown"!?!! Geddit?!!?!

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Budget-Time Beaux:

- **Edward Heathcote Amery** – the *Mail*'s Munchy Money Maestro!?!
- **Simon Heffer** – the *Telegraph*'s Mr Sex!?!
- **George Pascoe-Watson** – the *Sun*'s Political Editor?!? Don't laugh, Mister, he's for real!?!?

Byeeee!!!

● Read Glenda's blog on www.fleet-streetsfinest.co.uk. Should Freddie be sacked or given a knighthood? Let's hear your views! Or, if you don't have any, text us anyway on 87431. Or do you have any amusing photographs of Ricky Ponting? Or do you have a favourite recipe? Join the debate on www.fillupthepaper.com.

the PREMIERSH*TS

MOAN... GROAN... APRIL AND MAY ARE RIDICULOUS!
CHELSEA FIXTURE CONGESTION
MOURINHO
THE BOSS IS RIGHT, THERE ARE JUST TOO MANY GAMES
HOW WILL I FIND TIME TO PROMOTE MY BOOK?
DON'T SAY I WON'T BE ABLE TO GO CLUBBIN'
LAMPARD
TERRY
A. COLE
THEY'LL MISS ME DOWN THE BOOKIES
BUT I NEED 3 DAYS OF EVERY WEEK TO COUNT MY MONEY!

TAXPAYERS FACE £50 BILLION BILL AS LANDFILL SITES ARE 'FULL TO BURSTING'

by Our Waste Staff **Alan Rubbisher**

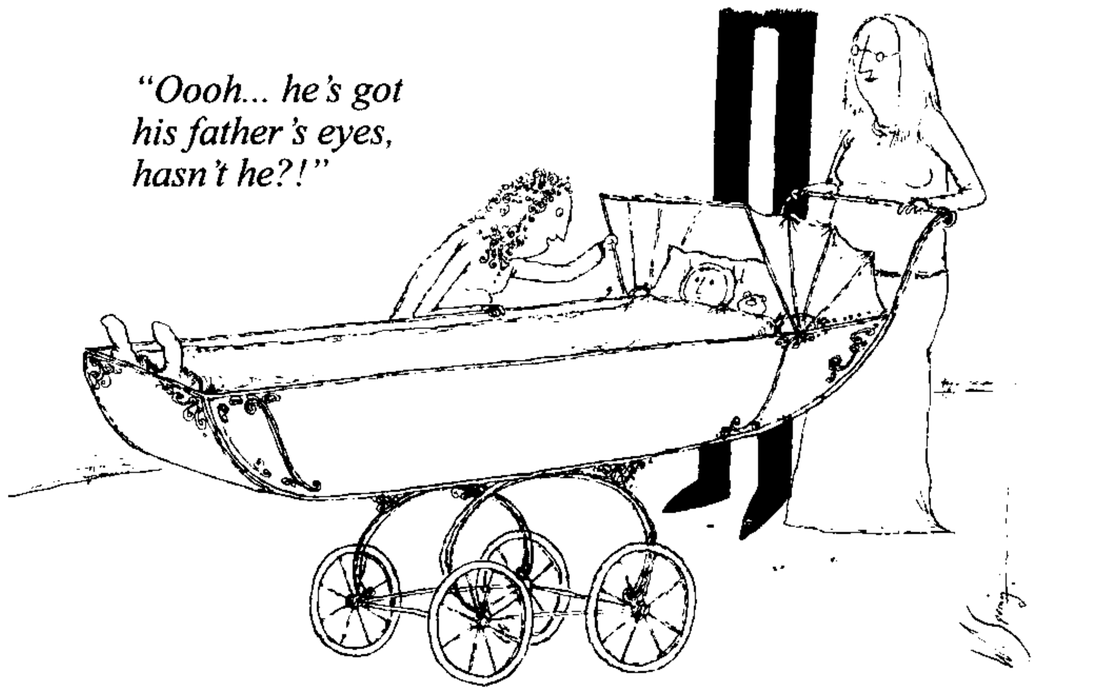
A MASSIVE crisis is facing Britain's waste authorities following the news that all the UK's landfill sites are full.

In recent months, it has emerged, landfill sites managers have been presented with the need to bury millions of tons of unsold copies of David Blunkett's memoirs, *The Years of Boredom*.

Even when put through a series of great industrial "crushers", the books "still occupy a space the size of half of Gloucestershire," said a spokesman for the industry, Phil Holes.

"It is every waste operative's worst nightmare" said Mr Holes. "All our forecasts were thrown into chaos when we suddenly found we were having to deal with 1,500 lorryloads a day of the Blunkett volumes."

And that's not the end of the problem," he went on. "Even when they are buried, these volumes have been found to emit vast quantities of toxic gas, which can render people unconscious for miles around."



'WORSE THAN STALIN OR HITLER'

Top Civil Servant's Astonishing Attack On Gordon Brown

by Our Political Staff
Peter Mandarin

LORD TURNCOAT, formerly Britain's most high-flying civil servant, lashed out today at the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, describing him as a "tinpot dictator who sent millions of people to their deaths in the Siberian wilderness".

"Or if he didn't quite do that," said Lord Turnbollocks, "he did something much worse, i.e. being jolly rude to me by not listening to a word of my excellent advice."

Turnbull and Asshole

Lord Turnbullshit was Gordon Brown's top adviser at the Treasury for many years, before going on to serve Tony Blair as Cabinet Secretary.

Speaking off the record to a room full of journalists, Lord Asshole went on, "Gordon seemed to think that just because he'd been elected he could ignore people who were much cleverer than himself, i.e. me."

Eye Grand Apology Offer

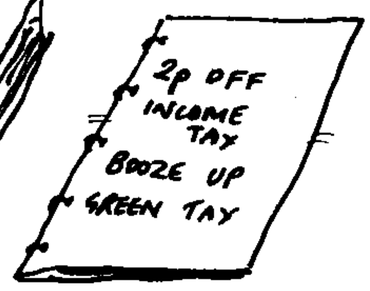
What would YOU like us to apologise for?

SIMPLY tick the relevant box and we will issue a heartfelt sincere and unqualified apology on your behalf.

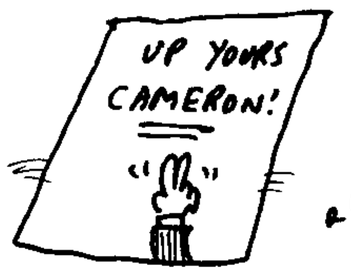
- ☐ **The Slave Trade**
- ☐ **The Crusades**
- ☐ **The Sinking of the Titanic**
- ☐ **The Peasants' Revolt**
- ☐ **Global Warming**
- ☐ **The Black Death**
- ☐ **Channel 4**
- ☐ **Bird Flu**
- ☐ **Suez**
- ☐ **England 0 Israel 0**
- ☐ **The Battle of Agincourt**
- ☐ **Sir Peregrine Worsthorne**

IF YOU would like us to apologise for something you didn't do, just go to our apology website and add your name to the lists of thousands who have already expressed their sorrow and guilt at various events that have taken place throughout history.

Budget in full



Budget in short



Budget in essence

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

FROM THE GREANO AND DANDY

IT'S TRUE! THERE HAS BEEN A CHANGE IN THE CLIMATE, DON'T CHA KNOW?
NOWADAYS PEOPLE DON'T CARE IF YOU ARE POSH!
IT'S GLOBAL WARMING
EVERYONE'S WARMING TO DAVE SNOOTY AND HIS CHUMS!
HOORAH! I'M THE PEOPLE'S TOFF!

EYE BUDGET GUIDE

A married chancellor with two children looking to change jobs in the short term

WHILST at first glance you may think the headline-grabbing two-pence cut in the basic rate of tax will leave you significantly better off, a closer reading of any newspaper on Friday morning will confirm tough times ahead as your poll ratings plummet in the coming months.

An Apology by Private Eye

IN RECENT years, Private Eye may have suggested that "Taking the Independent" was a harmless leisure activity on a par with smoking or drinking and that even when taken every day was unlikely to cause longterm ill effects.

Cannabis independica

However, we now realise that the new strain of Independent (known as "Junk") is much stronger and, if indulged in too frequently, can lead to depression, psychosis and serious rotting of the brain.

We would like to apologise for this very serious misjudgement on our part and now support legislation which would reclassify the Independent as a Class Z newspaper, the consumption and distribution of which should be prohibited.

ROSIE BOREPOT writes ■ Why I still believe in the freedom to smoke the Independent whatever the experts say... **94**

'I STILL LOVE PAUL'S MONEY' says Heather

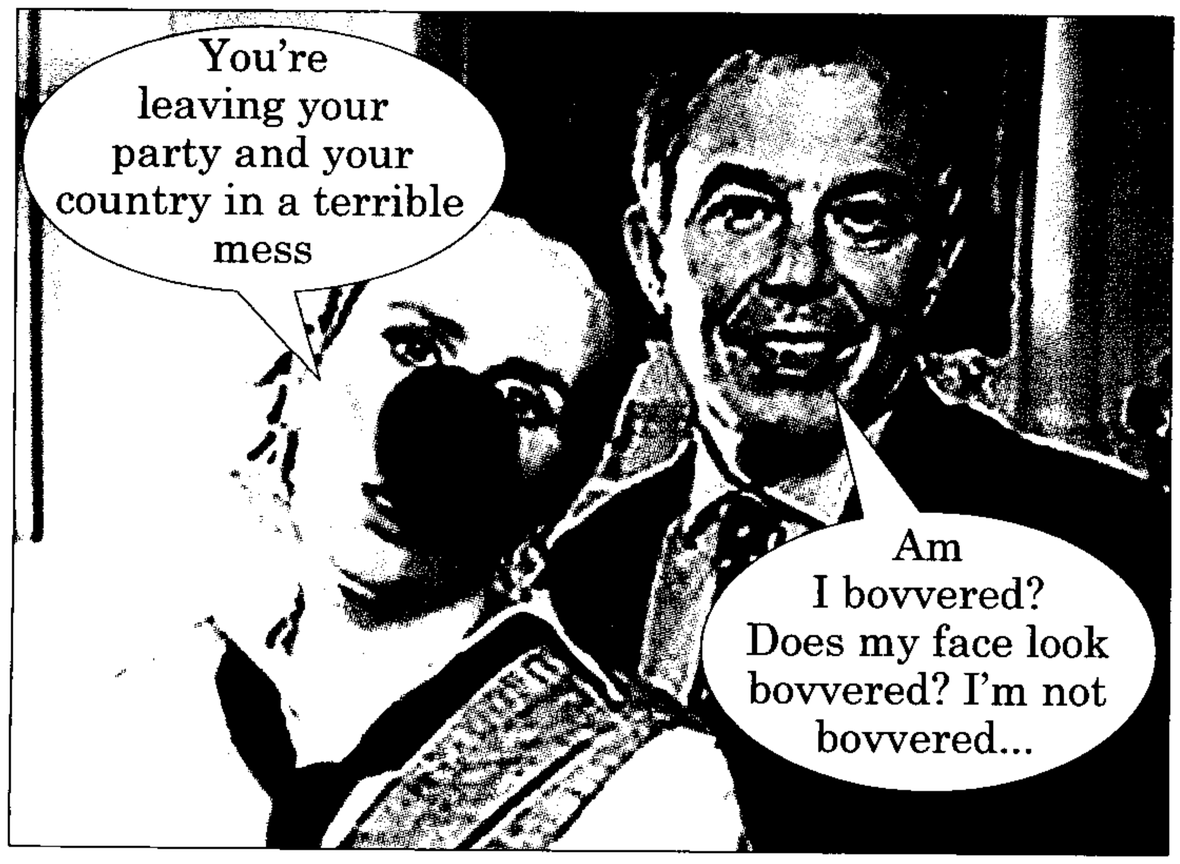
by our Showbiz Staff **Lies R. Minnelli**

THE estranged wife of former Beatle Sir Paul McCartney last night blamed the lawyers for her separation from his bank account.

Talking on American television's "Good Morning Wyoming" she told anchorman Larry Humbug, "The money and I still have a great relationship. I never wanted to lose the money. It's only the lawyers who are trying to get between me and Macca's loot."

Full story and pictures **p. 94**

THAT HILARIOUS COMIC RELIEF SKETCH



Nursery Times

Friday, March 30, 2007

HAMELIN COUNCIL DEFENDS FORTNIGHTLY RUBBISH COLLECTION

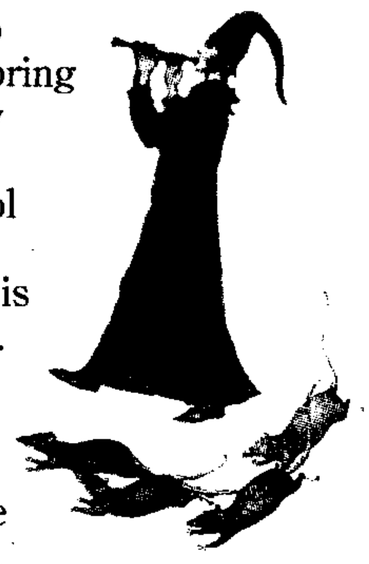
by Our Environmental Staff **Billie Pied-Piper**

THE local council of Hamelin are sticking by their controversial decision to stop weekly rubbish collections. The council claim that the new fortnightly service will force residents to compost and recycle waste, thus making the operation more environmentally friendly.

Residents, however, have expressed fears that the cutbacks will lead to the whole town being overrun by rats.

Said the Mayor, "This is ludicrous scaremongering. The one thing that isn't going to happen is a plague of rats running through the streets, scaring dogs and biting children."

He continued, "Any suggestion that the council will end up having to bring in a hugely expensive pest control solution consultant is far-fetched. As is the idea that we would then refuse to pay him, leading to the kidnap of all our children. Trust me. That's not going to happen."



On other pages

"I didn't steal 60 million tarts," says Black of Hearts **2**

Jiminy "One-Day" Cricket found drunk – "My conscience guides me to apologise," he admits **3**

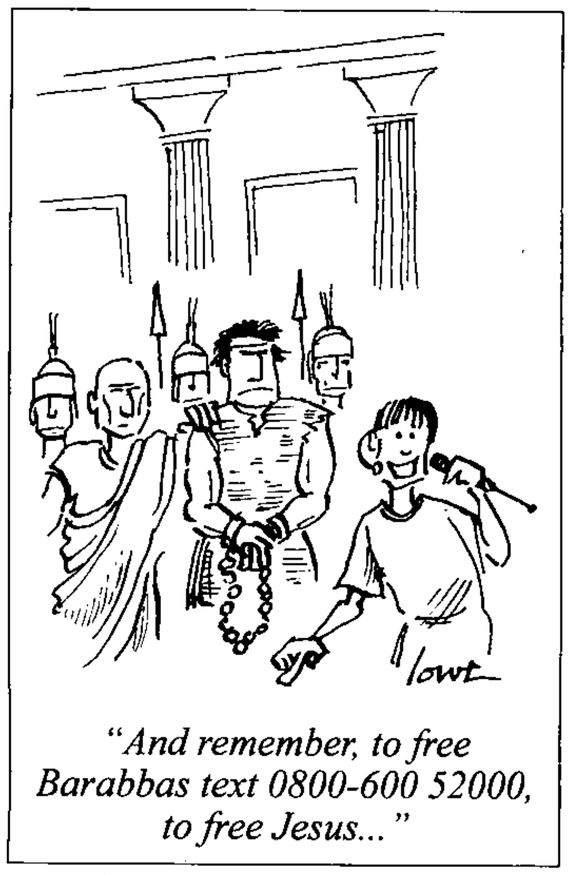
GM fly swallows old woman **94**

THE ALTERNATIVE VOICE

DAVE LIVINGSPART
(Co-Chair of the Peckham & Camberwell Anti-Trident Pro-Cannabis Ban The Routemaster and Pro-Hugo-Chavez World Alliance).

Once again it is totally sickening to see the white supremacist and Christian bigot William Wilberforce being feted by the media for his so-called abolition of slavery, whereas, as is well known, the entire British Establishment connived in these genocidal atrocities for many centuries until forced to make a massive U-turn by the armed resistance movements led by the slaves themselve, who, having read Marx, Engels etc, rose up as one to throw off the hated yoke of patriarchal mercantile imperialism which no one had done more than Wilberforce to propagate er.. and that is why every white person should not only apologise and offer their houses as reparation to any black persons living in their community but should string themselves up for it is, frankly, to my mind, the only language they understand. I had that Robert Mugabe in the back of the cab the other day, very clever man and totally maligned by the white racist Colonialist media who cannot accept a black man selling his own people into slavery... er...

© A. Taxi Driver 2007.



"And remember, to free Barabbas text 0800-600 52000, to free Jesus..."

'WHAT'S THE POINT OF THE LABOUR PARTY?' asks Trident

by Our Nuclear Sub Editor **Dee Terence**

THE TRIDENT missile system last night queried the relevance of the Parliamentary Labour Party in the modern era.

Said the Trident, "It's very expensive to run, it's out of date and it clearly doesn't deter anyone any more".

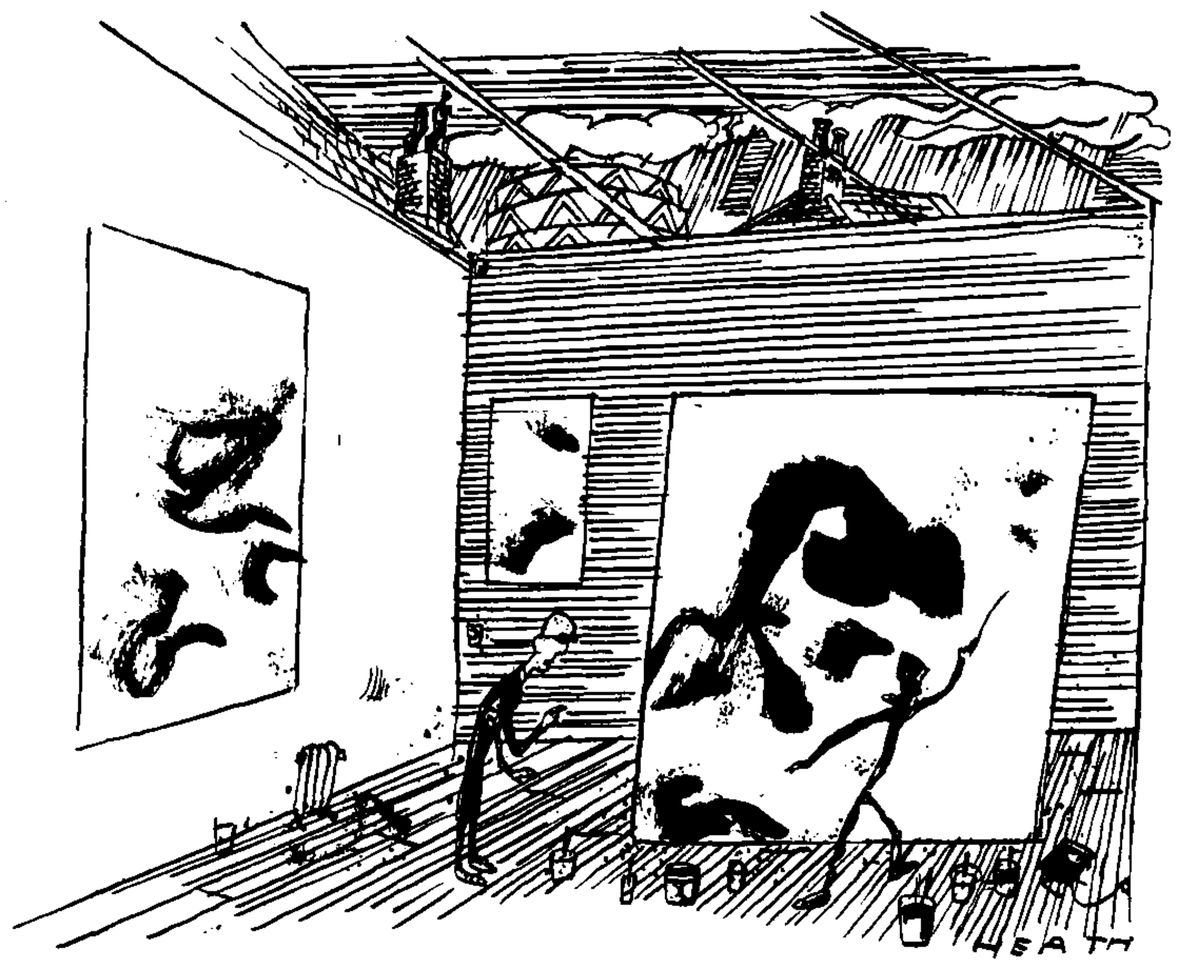
He continued, "It can't even stop a dangerous Prime Minister from forcing through mad policies that it is supposed to oppose. Let's face it, it's entirely obsolete and belongs to a bygone era when people were scared of its capability".

He concluded, "The only point to it that I can see is to create a few Scottish jobs".

But supporters of the Parliamentary Labour Party disagreed, claiming that it was being modernised and upgraded.

Said a spokesman, "It is urgently needed to send a clear message to any new Prime Minister that he can do whatever he likes".

Trident is 94 years old.



"I think what you are doing is complete crap. And I'd like very much to be your agent"

Mary Ann Bighead

Don't stop me flying around the world being clever!

They say travel broadens the mind – which in my case takes some doing – but it's true! I've flown to more countries than you have and everywhere I've been not only have I learnt something to make me even cleverer but the local people have benefited immeasurably from meeting someone as clever as me.

When I was going round the world writing a column for this newspaper (*What I Did On My Holidays and You Didn't*) I went to Nowheresville, Arizona in America. Everybody thought I was wonderful.

"We love the way you talk. It's different from us," they all said to me. "And the way *you* talk is different from me," I pointed out, "Because I am very clever and you aren't."

This had never occurred to them before which is a perfect example of the long term benefits of allowing the Bighead family to carry on travelling.

And don't worry about carbon emissions because I've cleverly planted a whole forest of trees in Wales in the Valley of Lleverllogs.

© *Mary Ann Bighead*

The Hutton Inquiry Into The BBC's Decision To Screen Alastair Campbell's Diaries

HAVING carefully scrutinised all the evidence, I find Alastair Campbell blameless in his decision to sell his diaries to the BBC.

I find no evidence to support the BBC's wild assertions that these three 45-minute programmes will be a riveting insight into the inner workings of Downing Street, and any less of a snoozefest than David Blunkett's diaries were.

In conclusion, I find that Alastair Campbell has acted only in the public interest by pocketing a six-figure sum from the morally bankrupt and duplicitous BBC.

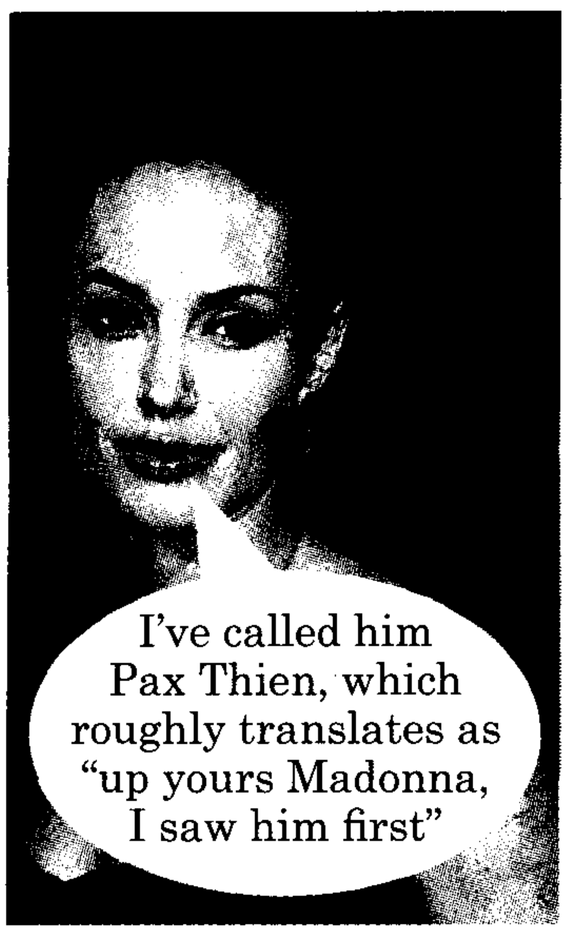
In my opinion, the BBC and the BBC alone must shoulder the full blame for this heinous act.

That Dramatic Timetable Of Events In Full

Friday March 23rd 9.02am
The BBC announces they're paying Alastair Campbell a six-figure sum to present the TV adaptation of his diaries about his time in Number 10

Friday March 23rd 9.03am
David Kelly begins spinning in his grave

ANGELINA JOLIE ADOPTS ANOTHER BABY



Who Do You Want To Play Mrs Thatcher In That New Film?

Should it be

- Ⓐ Dame Helen Mirren?
- Ⓑ Dame Judi Dench?
- Ⓒ Dame Joanna Lumley?
- Ⓓ Dame Maggie Smith?
- Ⓔ Sir Stephen Fry?

Ring in with your choice on 0860-7272 (calls charged at £50 a minute). Or, if you don't think any of the above would be ideal to play the Iron Lady, you can text us with your preferred choice on 23456... We've just had an email suggesting Billie Piper! Great idea, Mrs Denise Archer of Weston-super-Mare! Let's keep those calls, emails and texts coming in... And here's another – Carol Vorderman! Well, that's certainly a good idea, although I don't think she's strictly an actress
(Cont. p. 94)

BESTIE
I'LL DEVELOP A SEARCH ENGINE AND CALL IT 'GOOGLE'
A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS DARLING
LUCKILY HE REJECTED HER OFFER AND WENT STRAIGHT TO THE PATENT OFFICE

In The American Courts

The State of Illinois v. Lord Black of Doublecross before Her Honour Mrs Judge Cockleburger III

Mrs Judge Cockleburger: My fellow Americans, this is gonna be one helluva case! Yes, siree. We got the high life, we got the low life. We even got Mrs Black the Second!

(Enter left The State of Illinois Supreme Court Majorettes, singing "Chicago, Chicago, One helluva town! Lord Black, Lord Black, We're sending you down!"*.)*

(Wild applause from jury.)

Judge Cockleburger: And now introducing the stars of the show! Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, please put your hands together for the Chief Prosecuting Counsel of the great State of Illinois, Mr Al Catraz!

(Applause)

And in the red corner, Counsel for the Defence, Mr Hiram Greenbucks!

(Applause)

And finally, skulking there in the dock like a low-down coyote *(© Rev. Dubya Bush)*, you see the English Lord, Mr High-and-Mighty Black.

Greenbucks: Objection, Your Honour. I would like to address the jury.

Mrs Judge Cockleburger: Take it away, Hiram!

Greenbucks: My client is no high-and-mighty British Lordship, as Your Honour suggests. He is just a humble, ornery Canadian lumberjack who likes to be known to his friends as plain "Conman". I'm sorry, I'll read that again. He likes to be known as plain "Conrad".

Foreman of the Jury: We find Lord Conrad guilty as hell.

Cockleburger: All in good time! And it's now time for a word from our sponsor.

(Commercial break for deep-pan pizzas, lager beer and haemorrhoid cream)

Cockleburger: Welcome back to the trial of the century! And it's time to hear the opening speech from our honourable State Prosecuting Attorney Mr Catraz. Take it away, Al.

Al Catraz: Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the tale you are about to hear will shock you to the roots of your being. It is an epic saga of larceny, greed and avarice, perpetrated by the man you see sitting there before you, the Grand Old Duke of Black, 4,017th in line to the throne of Buckingham Castle in England.

(The Illinois Junior High Freshmen Dancers, dressed as Beefeaters, come on to sing "Money Makes the world go around")

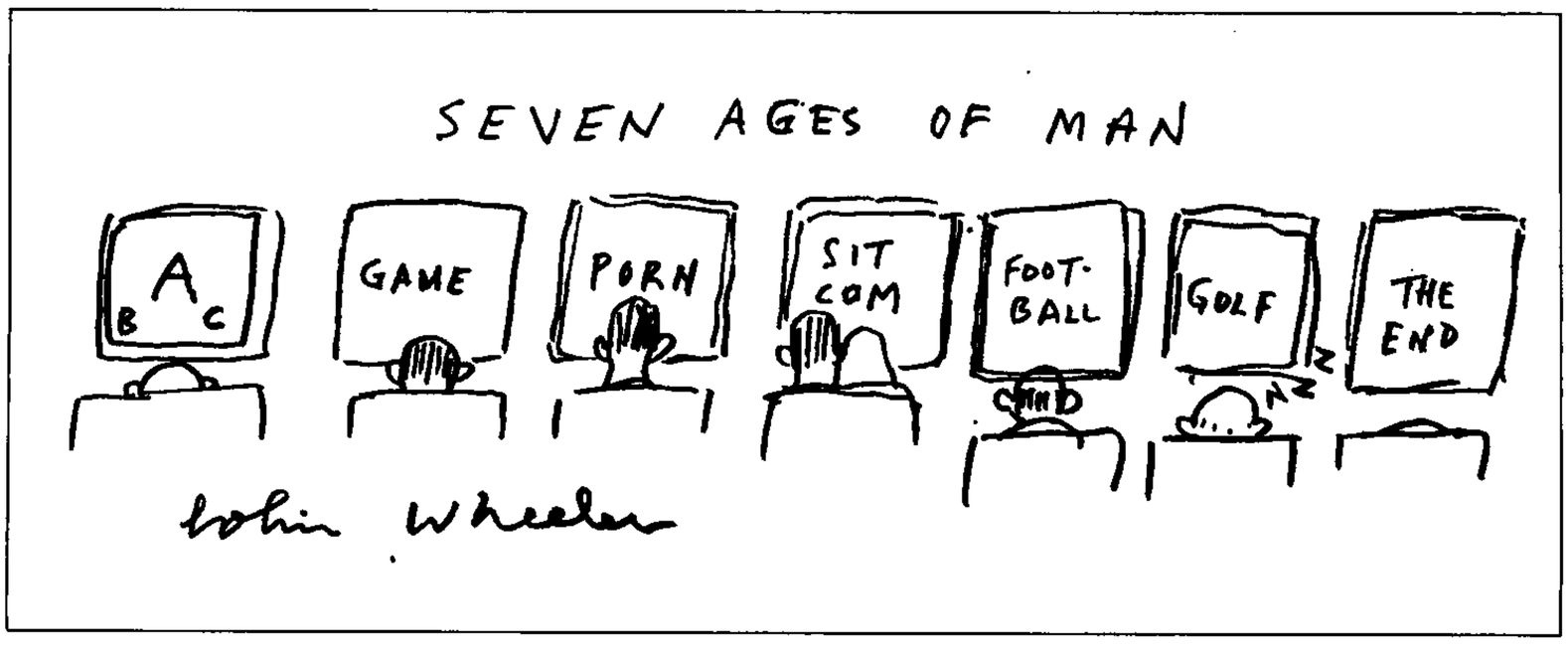
Mr Catraz: You will hear how Lord Blackadder and his scarlet woman, the Countess Barbara of Amiel...

Lady Black *(seated in gallery, demurely dressed as Dorothy from Wizard of Oz and looking not a day over 66)*: Scumbag! Vermin! Bastard!

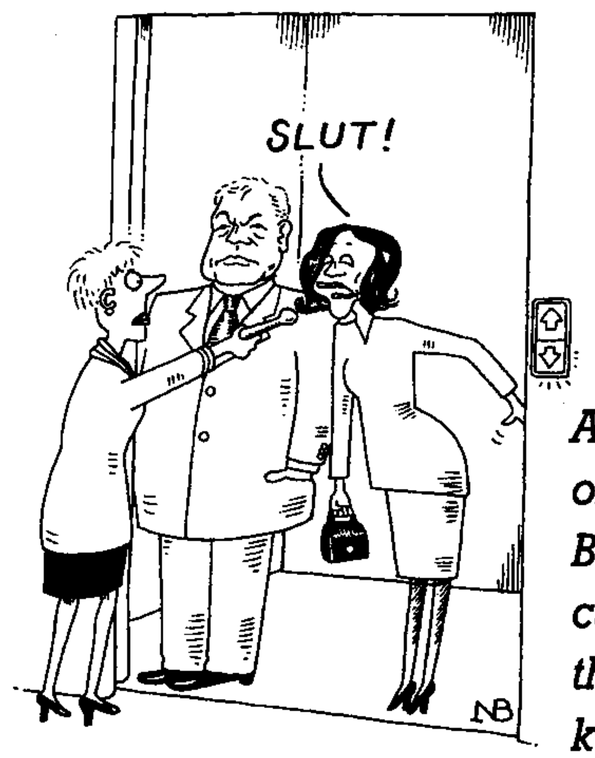
Cockleburger: Silence in court. I will not have this courtroom turned into a circus.

(Enter troop of elephants holding placards in their trunks, spelling out the message "O.J. Black is innocent")

Catraz: Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, as I was saying, you will hear how these two outlaws, this latter-day version of Bonnie and Clyde, systematically robbed the poor, innocent shareholders of Bollinger International, in order to finance a spending spree not seen since the days of Cleopatra. A madcap crazy whirl of private jets, fancy limousines, champagne and caviar for breakfast, whole cupboards full of designer shoes, fabulous holidays on remote tropical paradise islands, Louis Vuitton suitcases crammed with precious jewels and warehouses full of unsold copies of the Daily Telegraph. Nothing was too extravagant for Milord Aristoblack and his Marie Antoinette, Dame Barbara Cartland. So let me take you through this highly complex trail of deception,



NEW OLD SAYINGS



A case of the Black calling the pot kettle

chicanery, double-dealing, embezzlement and fraud.

(Points to huge screen showing picture of Lord Black in striped jumper holding bag marked "Swag")

We are looking at the tangled affairs of no fewer than 487 interlocking companies. At one end we have Bollinger International, with its 79 percent holding in Tollinger International, with its 83 percent holding in Mollinger, Nassau, itself a 92 percent part-owned subsidiary of Kissinger, Cayman Islands, which in turn was controlled by the Toronto Stone and Gravel Co. Inc, in which Lord Black and his wife were the sole shareholders.

Foreman of Jury: Where does a fella get to eat around here?

Mr Greenbucks *(for Lord Black)*: Your Honour, it must be my turn now. So I'd like to call the guy you've all been writing to hear, the big man himself, "Honest Con" of Flat 15, 4672 Saskatchewan Avenue, Moosejaw, Manitoba.

Black: Never before in history has any courtroom been treated to such a pusillanimous, preposterous and pitiful farrago of ignorant poltroonery. Or what the great Talleyrand might have called "the mendacious matter of moral mire".

Foreman of Jury: Can we have an interpreter, please?

Black: This entire case is nothing more than a concoction of calumnies, put together by envious lickspittles and mean-minded midgets, enraged by the genius of a man whose boots they are not worthy to lick and who has bestridden the stage of the world like no one since the great Napoleon Bonaparte, whom I am proud to call my friend!

(Applause. Lake Michigan High School Orchestra strikes up 1812 Overture [arr. Irving Berlin], complete with cannons and Bells of Moscow and fireworks, courtesy of the Bora Bora Pyrotechnic Company [Afghanistan])

Case to be continued...

DIARY

RUSSELL BRAND

My bum's got an 'ole in it, and what I want to know is 'as yours, then, cos, you needs the 'ole, dontcha, else you'd go gettin' all bunged up an' we can't 'ave that, now, can we, madam, what with the old verbalissimus diarrhoea and my William Winkle's got an 'ole in it, right in the very top, or bottom, dependin' on 'ow it's feelin' at the time, so's I myself would argue like Wittgenstein purely in the interests of public debate vee-za-vee the ennoblement of public knowledge and wotavya, dontcha know, my liege, that if one's William Winkle didn't have an 'ole in it, you'd 'ave to piss aht your nasal cavity or your mouthal cavity, and that wouldn't be quite nice, would it, 'specially not at formal banquets in honour of His Royal Majesty the Lord Mayor of London or some such eminentry, ooh, the Lord Mayor of London, now there's a name to conjure wiv, not that I'd ever bother to attend a theatrical performance by that particular Greek Eminence, not on your fuckin' nelly I wouldn't, what with all that ermine and whatever bungin' up his mouth-hole, so's 'e can't get the words aht, I mean I ask you, 'oo wants to 'ave a fuckin' snog with a dignitary what's got his gob all clogged up with velvet and crimson, so's you can't pursue your tongue all the way to the back of his aforementioned crevice, oooh cheeky, all this chatterin' about snoggin' the Lord Mayor of this Venerable Metropolis is positively makin' me go all Schopenhauer, shoppin' trolley, wodever, but then I always lives a quiet life, what wiv my various cavities strategically placed in all the permissible opportunities, it's positively Brechtian the way I carry on chattin 'n' stuff about this, that and a bit of the other, like I was passin' the time of the aujourdhui with my matey Ricky Gervais, now, oh my giddy aunt, there's a fuckin' funny fellow, no mistake, he's a gentleman could make me piss my fuckin' knickerbockers and shitty-witty all o'er the shoppy-woppy in a most unorthodox and unpardonable fashion 'cos I'd be positively 'owlin wiv full-throated laughter and old fashioned merriment of a type for your delectation not readily seen this side of Old London Town o'er these past few centuries or more, my liege and sovereign, I wonder what Baudelaire would make of that, it is my disconcerted suspicion that he'd doubtlessly be well chuffed appertaining to all this rabbitin' about an' 'e'd really wank 'is fuckin' socks off, I mean talk about a veritable Bacchanalia, 'ave you ever seen such strumpets as that Britney Spears, staggerin' about, all pissed-up, givin' er tresses a good yammerin' wiv the old scissor-style instrumentals, I mean, what's that all about, 'oo does she fuckin' think she is, that Britney Fuckin' Spears, goin' around leavin' bits of 'er 'air all over the fuckin' shop, mind you I wouldn't say Non Merci to a quick shag with 'er in the barber's chair, just so long as she donned the requisite wig so she don't look like Robert Fuckin' Robinson whilst I explore her ladylike orifices including full rear and frontal sphincters with my Tinky Tailorman if one can beckon forth the memory of previous exploratories, parlez-vous, aw, lovely, truly-wuly beautiful, the way je can hoover up the old bugle for hours on end employing nothing but one's most welcoming, nay, capacious nasal cavity, that's well satisfying, almost as satisfying as having a bit of the old rumpy-pumpy, si vous plait, mon-sewer, with Her Majesty the Queen, not that I would ever assume to avail myself of that most gracious opportunity but if it was offered as an option, well, my darlings, which of us would feel entitled to turn up our noses at such an illustrious offering, 'cos then we might all get our old 'eads well chopped off, so's like if you was eating a chicken sandwich you'd not put it into your mouth 'cos your mouth would be lying in a bucket alongside the rest of your 'ead, no, you'd 'ave to put it straight into what remained of your neck, wouldn't you, and that wouldn't be a very pretty sight, you beheaded tryin' to tuck a Marks and Fuckin Spencer chicken sandwich straight into your old throaty-woaty, nah, that would cause you a somewhat multitude of bovver, 'cos the crumbs would most like fall right into your severed blood vessels an' that, which wouldn't be so very amiable for my own good self, not being a fully-signed-up member of the messy persuasion, not like my esteemed friends and confederates Noel and Liam aka The Gallagher Brothers of that Ilk, who go fuckin' mentaw when a serviette is proferred towards their personages, 'cos they'd rather pursuance spillages all dahn their clothing rather than 'ave a nice little tidy-up an' you 'ave to pay 'omage to 'em, dontcha, 'cos they may be mucky littaw puppies but they don't 'alf make some well blindin' music, and if I wos a dog I tell you I'd be goin' up to Liam's lanky old leg and givin' it a well good humpin', 'cos the bloke doesn't 'alf turn me on, what wiv' his outsize anorak an' broody air of mystery and mayhem an' that, wooh, I'm gettin' well 'orny jes talkin' about him, just like 'e was some page three bird with ginormous lady's boobs floppin' about all over the shop, just like how Virginia Woolf put it with her magnificent plume in her classic oeuvre Mrs Dalloway, if I'm not very much mistaken, 'cos like me Virginia was a fuckin' rebel, she liked to wage war against conformity, we both sensed a fuckin' cosmic wankin' truth behind the world as we know it, and it's all to do with everything bein' one thing and time is a bicycle and we're all peddlin' away so fast that I become you and you become me and we are all together, as the late great John Lennon, bless 'im, taught us, even if some of us are well-oiled and others are well-chilled and the rest just dream of givin' the bounteously pulchritudinous Kate Moss a jolly good goin'-over in a dark passageway just like that Casanova, randy bugger, now there's an icon untethered from the quotidian if ever I saw one, 'e was an 'istoric geezer in an anatomical state of arousal and a fat lot of good it fuckin' did 'im too, 'e's not so much the rebel now, is he, no, he's just a skeleton, serves 'im fuckin' right so while I'm adrenalising on your screens twenty times a week and 'avin' the Life of Riley, whoever 'e fuckin' was, poor old Mister Casanova is just mouldering in his grave, all white and dusty and skeletal, like my great aunt daisy, but without the fanny so what I say is grab your nooky-wooky while you can, my friends, 'cos if, as we are peradventure informed, Mister God truly does reside in his heavenly abode atop those aromatic clouds, then we shall all want to take a gander, and I'm sittin' right pretty 'cos my bum's got an 'ole in it, an' that's all you need fuckin' know, gazooks my liege.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

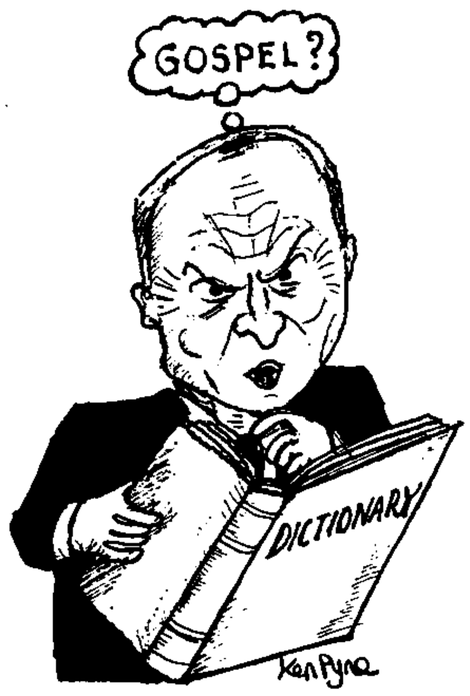
I'VE BEEN READING ABOUT THE CO2 EMISSIONS RESULTING FROM TVS, CONSOLES, DVD PLAYERS ETCETERA USING UP POWER WHEN NOT IN USE...
IT'S ALARMING, JOHNSON... WE'VE ALL BEEN FAR TOO COMPLACENT ABOUT THIS... IT COULD AFFECT THE FUTURE OF THE PLANET...
IT'S TERRIBLE TO THINK OF WHAT HABITUALLY GETS LEFT ON STAND-BY ALL NIGHT... WELL I'M PUTTING A STOP TO THAT IN THIS HOUSE.
VERY GOOD, SIR.
SO CAN I GO TO BED NOW, SIR..?
EXCEPT FOR YOU OF COURSE JOHNSON... I MIGHT NEED YOU LATER...

Literary Review

St Jeffrey's New Testament

The Gospel According To Judas
'Benjamin Iscariot'
(Macmillan, £9.99)

IN RECENT interviews, Lord Archole has admitted that his future fictions of the hard-backed kind may well be influenced by his recent time inside for verbal fictions. His first novel as a freed man turned on a criminal scam, and a book of short stories based on anecdotes heard from inmates (the source authors presumably properly contracted for credit and royalties) is due to come out next.



Nothing, though, had prepared the world for this latest product of Jeff's shame. Having hinted that his four rambling volumes of prison diaries were inspired by Oscar Wilde's chokey prose, the great storyteller has now fallen under an even more famous literary influence: the Bible.

The Gospel According to Judas is a 90-page booklet printed in the traditional style of scripture – numbered lines, red print for Christ's dialogue, gold-leaf edging to the pages and a reading ribbon – attributed on the front cover to "Benjamin Iscariot", son of the notorious Judas.

Clearly, as a conceit, the whole thing would work better if the book had simply been published as a newly discovered gospel. But it probably wouldn't be a great idea for Archole to be caught passing off a false story as the truth. He doesn't want that pesky ankle tag disrupting the hang of his trousers again. And – perhaps an even greater deterrent to such a publishing technique – he wouldn't get any publicity.

Accordingly, the fly-leaf makes squeakily clear that this is a fiction: "Recounted by Jeffrey Archer with the assistance of Professor Francis J Maloney, SDB, AM, STD, DPHIL (Oxon)." Alas, the page looks a bit unbalanced: Jeff has no letters to put after his name. Maybe he could have used his numbers?

Quite why a distinguished Catholic theologian is riding sidecar for Archole's rehabilitative fantasies is hard to understand. Still more bewildering is that the divinity don secured the great fictionaliser a launch at the Vatican and the implied endorsement of Pope Benedict XVI. John Lennon once famously said of Jeff, after an early encounter, that he "could bottle your pee and sell it". Now it seems that he could even pass it off as holy water.

The spin in Rome is that il Papa, infuriated by the global success of *The Da Vinci Code*, believed that the Holy See should answer back with religious fiction from its own perspective.

But, if so, it seems odd that the church would have backed a project which repeats all of the sins of Dan Brown's book – from dead prose and ridiculous plot twists to denial of the deepest beliefs of Catholics.

Does the Pope know that Jeff's book explicitly depicts Jesus as human rather than divine? And what is the point – theologically or for the reputation of Catholicism – of a novella in which Jeff simply reverses the main twists in the evangelists' accounts of the passion of Christ?

Archole has decided, quite arbitrarily, that Judas did not betray Christ, did not accept thirty pieces of silver, did not hang himself in shame. In fact, it was Judas who was betrayed by a soldier. History has wrongly vilified him.

Ah. Which is presumably the point. Useless as a novel or theology, the book is, like much late Archer, fascinating psychologically. There's a possible really baroque reading in which Jeff may be telling us that we should not vilify Ted Francis, key prosecution witness in Archole's perjury case.

On known form, however, it's unlikely that the writer would have reached such a level of mature self-understanding. No. We're clearly supposed to see the Judas of this book as Jeff: a man whose actions have been wilfully misunderstood by a vengeful legal and political establishment and writers with an agenda. Perhaps it's all a hint to Archer's boys that their duty is to write a volume exonerating him.

Actually, the most vilified and hated figure in history and Judas Iscariot do have something in common. Judas's hanging, as described in the Bible, was a misuse of a blameless tree. And, even in Archer's writing career, few trees have died as needlessly as the ones used for this tedious exercise in self-pity. Can't they put a tag on his hands?

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

South of the River
Blake Morrison
(Chatto £17.99)

NAT AND ANTHEA sat in the Millennium Café, in sight of the London Eye, scanning the newspaper headlines about foot-and-mouth disease. Outside in the street the marchers protesting at the council's plans to build a new Tesco filed noisily by. Nat knew that in the end he would have an affair with her. The spirit of the age – that sense of bright, Blairite purpose – ordained it. In the meantime they would talk about literature.

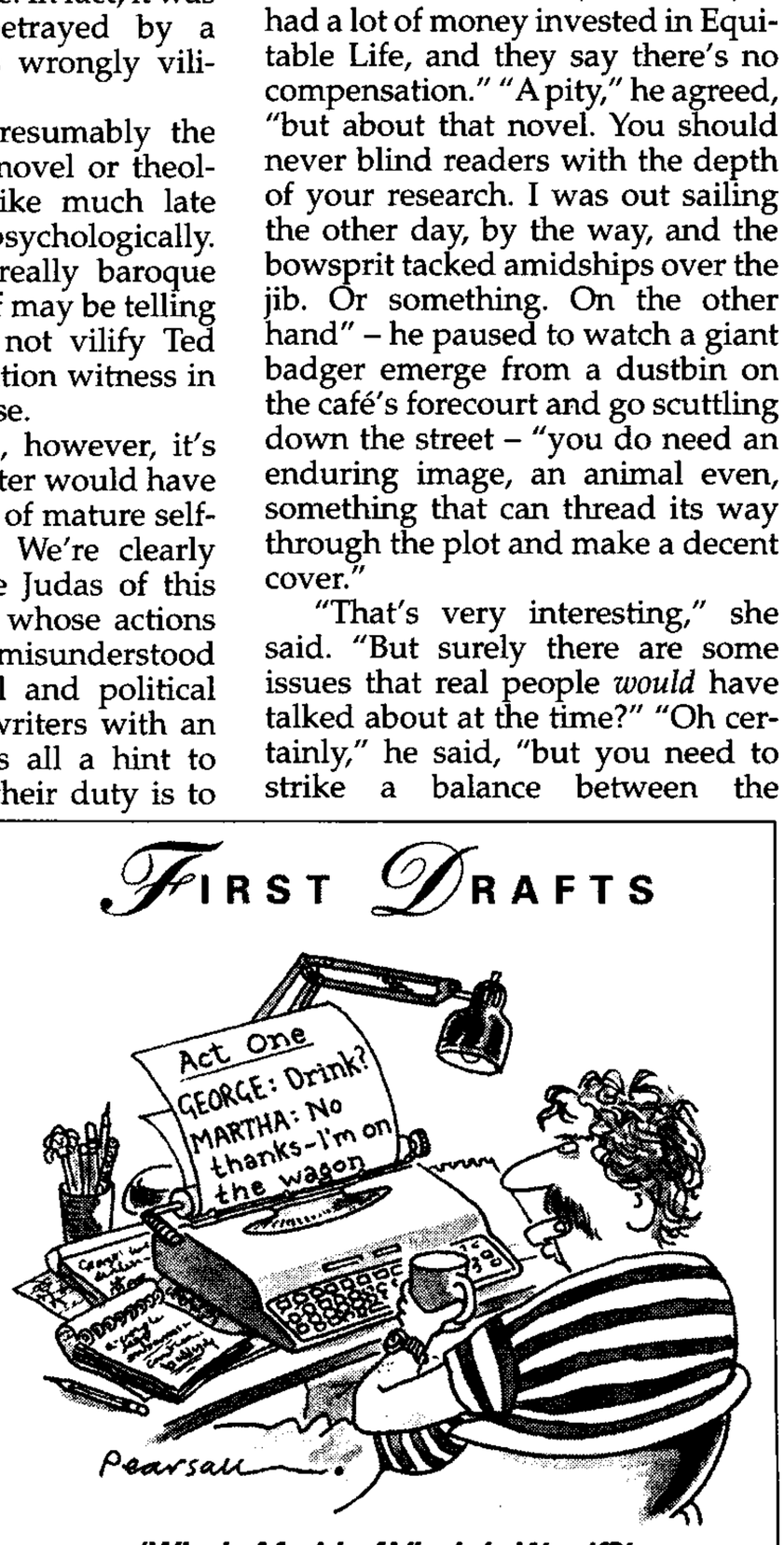
"If you were writing a novel about the state of England in the period 1997-2002," Anthea wondered, as the sound of *Definitely Maybe* erupted from the café's jukebox, "what would you put in it?" "Oh, I don't know," Nat told her, "the important thing is not to chuck in too many obvious symbols." On the television screen above their heads, they could see David Beckham, prone on the carpet of green turf, flick his foot against an Argentine player. "Too many lists of what people were listening to, or watching or reading." He smoothed the pages of his copy of Nick Hornby's *About A Boy* with the fingers of his left hand. "Or the kind of the thing that was in the newspapers at the time. That tends to annoy people."

"That reminds me," she said, "I had a lot of money invested in Equitable Life, and they say there's no compensation." "A pity," he agreed, "but about that novel. You should never blind readers with the depth of your research. I was out sailing the other day, by the way, and the bowsprit tacked amidships over the jib. Or something. On the other hand" – he paused to watch a giant badger emerge from a dustbin on the café's forecourt and go scuttling down the street – "you do need an enduring image, an animal even, something that can thread its way through the plot and make a decent cover."

"That's very interesting," she said. "But surely there are some issues that real people *would* have talked about at the time?" "Oh certainly," he said, "but you need to strike a balance between the mundane drift of ordinary lives *and* the big events rolling on along the horizon. God, verrucas are hell. And I'm really upset about the Middle East." "I think I see," she said, spilling a copy of the *Hello* Princess Diana memorial number out of her handbag. "What about race?" "Has to be there," Nat assured her. "Black character absolutely mandatory these days." On the jukebox the strains of *Definitely Maybe* had given way to The Verve's *Bittersweet Symphony*. Outside the marchers had been replaced by a convoy of fuel protestors. "And what about sex?" she asked. "I thought you'd never ask," he said.

Back at her flat, she arched hungrily above his flaccid body in a maelstrom of passion broken only by the sound of a motorcycle courier delivering their invitation to the Millennium Night party at the Dome… [*continues for 500 pages*]

FIRST DRAFTS



'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?'
Edward Albee

LIBRARY NEWS

■ THE library service in Wakefield ran out of money in February – several weeks shy of the end of the financial year. With no money available for relief staff, holidays were forbidden, as was overtime.

One branch library was closed down entirely so that staff could be deployed elsewhere. Others had late opening cancelled – at such short notice that evening community groups turned up unwarned to find locked doors.

Wakefield Council says things will get back to normal in April, when the budget year begins. But Wakefield isn't the only library service with money troubles. In Kent, the county council marked World Book Day in March by announcing huge budget reductions in its library service. Letters warning of redundancy have been sent to 77 full and part-time librarians. "After the restructure has taken place it would be most unlikely that a member of the public going into a Kent library would see hide nor hair of a trained librarian," said Unison rep Mary Nolze.

And in Hammersmith, the Outreach service and mobile library are to be scrapped later this year. Outreach takes books to 40 locations in sheltered housing and nursing homes as well as delivering books, large print materials and talking books to housebound disabled people.

So what is the government doing to stop this steady disintegration of the UK's public libraries? A consultation questionnaire entitled "A Blueprint for Excellence" is currently doing the rounds, from the Museums Libraries and Archives Partnership, asking "what excellence would look like" in public libraries. Er, for one thing, the libraries would be open and staffed.

EXPERIENCED SECRETARY Fully averse with modern office working. P/T or F/T.

Whitby Gazette

Books & Bookmen

■ IN PROMOTING her new novel, Marina Lewycka has recalled the rejection of her debut, *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*, by Pat Kavanagh, a celebratedly acerbic agent at PFD who is married to Julian Barnes.

It seems the letter was particularly wounding because it contained the magisterial words "we cannot summon the enthusiasm". Alas for prickly Pat, plenty of other people could: Lewycka was picked up by PFD's rivals AM Heath, the book was sold to Penguin, has won three awards, and UK sales alone top 800,000.

■ PETER GODWIN's Zimbabwe memoir, *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*, is the victim of an unlikely curse: a glowing lead review in the *Sunday Times*.

The problem is that the praise ("powerful... a moving meditation") came from RW Johnson, the controversial Cape Town-based former don whose books and journalism have made him anathema to the ANC; and, worse, he disclosed in the review that Godwin was "my student at Oxford".

■ JEANETTE WINTERSON has a new book out later this year, and she's dreading the experience. "Reviewers are people who are paid to make a mess of someone else's work," she somewhat unwisely rages on her website, and moans that promoting novels inevitably entails "the lifestyle stuff, the media froth, really stupid people writing really stupid things, and of course I know exactly what happens if you hit back – they come for your blood."

Blood? A little overwrought, perhaps?

■ PICADOR held a bash for its authors at a Soho club last week, with even the curmudgeonly VS Naipaul lured from his rural lair. But although the imprint's publisher Andrew Kidd gave an upbeat speech, the party looked like a bid to boost sinking morale: the overall Macmillan group is now a long way behind publishing's Big Four, with only 3.1 percent market share, and last year Picador for once failed to win a major literary prize.

Asked about this, one astute observer of the book scene stared glumly into his plonk. "The Peter Straus legacy has just about gone," he said, referring to Kidd's predecessor, whose authors there included John Banville, Alan Hollinghurst and Jonathan Coe. "And, anyway, what do you expect from a company whose chief executive, Richard 'Barkin' Charkin, doesn't see the point of trade publishing?"

LUVVIES

As the interview starts, he shifts from a chair to a sofa. "I've been moving around the room trying to get fresh perspective," he explains. "I do feel a sense of duty to keep trying to push the envelope," he says, but at the same time he worries – excessively, I think – that only action movies will survive the shortened attention spans of the MySpace/YouTube/PSP generation. "It's almost like when silent films went talkie," he frets, his brow rumpling. "I will have to continue finding very succinct ways of putting my drama into adventure-based movies."

NICOLAS CAGE,
Guardian

Submitted by Strobes.

Do you believe in fate?

I live by it. I believe we're exactly where we're supposed to be at every given moment. Even if I'm cruising along and somebody is driving very slowly in front of me, I think there's a reason for it. It's easier to surrender to fate and let things happen the way they're supposed to. In my work, for example, I just wait for the universe to conspire to bring me the next script. I enjoy the surprises that life throws up. It's an adventure.

CAMERON DIAZ
Spirit & Destiny Magazine

Submitted by Zoe Grainge.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

"If you ask me everyone's gone 'Secret Biblical Code' mad!"

Private Eye's Worstseller Chart

Position	Author	Title	Publisher	Reported advance	Sales to date	Cost of advance per book	Copies needed to sell to make back advance
1	Gautam Malkani	*Londonstani*	HarperCollins	£400,000	8,020	£49.88	330,578
2	Ashley Cole	*My Defence*	Headline	£250,000	8,983	£27.83	165,562
3	Greg Dyke	*Inside Story*	HarperCollins	£600,000	15,874	£37.80	357,142
4	Michael Barrymore	*Awight Now*	Simon & Schuster	£300,000	20,842	£14.39	218,978
5	Chantelle Houghton	*Living The Dream*	Random House	£300,000	41,824	£7.17	230,769

Pseuds Corner

He looks at me, full, fat tears now rolling down his face. 'You know, we are doing it for each other.' I start crying too. It's easy to feel Sting's emotion when he's projecting it in stadiums; in a hotel room, it's shattering. Then we laugh hysterically. They never used to have those moments of group bonding, a convergence of souls before the show. 'We never had that. We grew apart within this vortex of tension. We stopped connecting and I want to fix that.'

CHRISSY ILEY joins the Police reunion tour, *Sunday Times Magazine*

And what veal it was: narrow slices of pot-roasted rump, the flesh pink and plump like the lips of a fair-haired teenage girl at her first party, the slender bard of fat like the enthusiastic over-smear of her silvery lipstick.

GILES COREN,
Times Magazine

Rock 'n' roll, at that time, was a fusion of intimacies. Repression bloomed into rapture like raging weeds shooting through cracks in the cement. Our music provided a sense of communal activism. Our artists provoked our ascension into awareness as we ran amok in a frenzied state of grace.

PATTI SMITH,
Guardian

Do you remember an ancient notion of how good the very best should be? This is Kristeen Young. She uses her keyboard as a highly trained Nazi might use an electronic rod for shocking the parts...The voice is a beautiful bayonet, and the life swills out in song – 'Strangle Bowie with/his neckerchief' she sings in Kill The Father – but with a heart big enough to trot horses on it.

MORRISSEY,
Guardian Magazine

He resembles a baby Cliff just ravished by Rimbaud, a slightly sinister David Cassidy with knowledge of Edith Piaf and Sylvia Plath. He's dressed in the kind of glam golden suit Marc Bolan might have worn if he'd had cocktails with Wittgenstein.

PAUL MORLEY reviews a performance by Rufus Wainwright, *Sunday Telegraph*

There's a massive Louis Vuitton trunk in the hall beside the front door and next to it is a Chanel surfboard – I saw it in a shop in St Tropez and had to have it for the hall. As you walk up the stairs you pass a pink fluorescent light that spells out "bollocks" in curly writing. I had it made it during my divorce and it seemed to sum up my general attitude.

MEG MATHEWS, 'My Home',
Independent

CONTRIBUTORS: Ian Evans, Chris Green, Paul Doyle, Ted Robbins, Patricia Hammond, Chris Sheppard.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

DEEPCUT DEATHS

Going public

LAWYERS acting for families of the four young recruits who died of gunshot wounds at the Deepcut army barracks are asking the High Court to force the government to hold a public inquiry.

An application this month for judicial review says that despite police investigations, internal army inquiries, inquests and a review by Nicolas Blake QC, the deaths remain mired in secrecy. The limitations of the only public hearings – four separate inquests – prompted the coroner who conducted them to support calls for a public inquiry.

Eye readers will be aware of the stink surrounding the deaths of Geoff Gray and James Collinson, both 17, Sean Benton, 20, and Cheryl James, 18. All young, all on guard duty, all killed by gun shot wounds in deaths that were rubber stamped as suicides. Against a background of forensic failure – no proper examination of the scenes, weapons not tested, crucial records and uniforms destroyed – was an army base largely run by sadistic non-commissioned officers, where bullying and sexual harassment were commonplace.

William Bache is solicitor for the families of James, Benton and a fifth Deepcut recruit, David Shipley, who drowned on duty in Germany in a shallow pool only feet away from colleagues who saw and heard nothing. In Bache's application to the High Court he says the need for an inquiry is "overwhelming" as questions remain about "whether any or all five of the dead recruits might have been murdered and the degree to which there

may have been a cover-up by any member of the armed forces or any of those investigating the deaths". He cited public concern about army training; the welfare of recruits; and whether they are vulnerable to abuse or "driven to self-harm or even to commit murder".

Bache details how witnesses were ordered not to have contact with the bereaved families, how weapons records in the case of Sean Benton were removed from the file, shredded and later replaced with a "reconstructed" record, how Benton's clothing had been washed and shell fragments removed from the skull of Cheryl James at post mortem were "lost". And he criticised a lack of public accountability.

Article Two of the European Convention on Human Rights provides that where someone has died under the care of the state, a thorough and independent inquiry with the participation of the family must take place. Bache argued that the fact that the families had been denied most of the evidence, as well as any opportunity to question witnesses or contribute meaningfully to an inquiry's conclusions, meant they had been denied this right.

The MoD has always resisted a public inquiry. The latest refusal from minister Derek Twigg, which prompted the application for a judicial review, claims that the review by Nicolas Blake QC (pictured above) was "an independent, objective and comprehensive analysis of matters which have a bearing on the four deaths". Yet in a special report last summer, the *Eye* took apart the Blake review and highlighted its shortcomings (Shots in the Dark, 1167) and concluded that Blake failed to get to the source of the stink at Deepcut.

No doubt ministers will cite Blake again when the MoD resists the judicial review application.

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

Forced errors?

AFTER Gordon Park's conviction for the murder of his ex-wife Carol in the so-called "lady in the lake" case (*Eyes* 1177 and 1150), he complained about the investigation carried out by Cumbria police.

The force dismissed his complaints so Park appealed to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), which has just ruled that there are four issues that should have been recorded as complaints.

Eye readers will remember that Carol's body was found in Lake Coniston in August 1997, twenty-one years after she disappeared. Although Park was arrested straightaway, he was only convicted in January 2005 on the most dubious of evidence (*Eye* 1150). The couple's two children are now at the forefront of a campaign to prove his innocence – a campaign recently joined by Tony Benn, who said: "It would appear that a grave injustice has been done."

The first of Park's complaints is that his defence was hampered because sometime between 1976 and 2004 Cumbria police lost the original missing person's case file. Park has always argued that he would have been able to prove his innocence if the police had kept all the original documents.

The second complaint is that police misled the judge and jury. During the trial, the coach taking them to see where Carol's body was discovered went by a strangely circuitous route, creating the impression that only a local man would know it. In reality there is a direct route straight up the main road. At trial police said the detour was "made purely for the purpose of the mini-bus", as if it could not be driven up the main road.

Park also asserts that witnesses were improperly coached. During the police interview of Glen Banks, an inmate with learning difficulties to whom Parks was said to have made a cell confession, it was clear that the police tape had been stopped and restarted several times. In court, Banks explained that "he [the officer] was, like, giving me a bollocking".

And finally Park claimed that exhibits from the lake were not properly logged and recorded. A rock supposedly found on the lakebed was deemed to have come from the garden of his home, and so linked him to the crime. However, there is no evidence that the rock was ever in Coniston, and no record of it at all until several days after it was supposedly recovered from the water by divers – none of whom recalled finding it.

Despite Park's successful appeal to the IPCC, and instead of looking into the matters raised, Cumbria police have asked that the IPCC strike out the complaints on grounds that they should have been made sooner, and that they were in any event covered at trial.

TRIDENT

Guarding the home front

SOME big guns have lobbed their shells of wisdom into the £25bn debate on Trident.

Former Labour defence secretary and ex-Nato chief Lord George Robertson wrote to the Guardian to remind "former colleagues" in the Commons to vote for Trident because of the "uncertain and complex world" of the future.

Robertson reminded MPs of his ministerial experience, but chose not to mention his current pastimes: five company directorships and four business advisory posts that include a job on the board of the Weir Group, a Scottish engineering company that owns a quarter of the shares in Devonport, a privately run yard that just happens to service the Trident submarine fleet. At least some future Trident work is likely to go to Devonport. Other Trident work may go to BAE's Barrow-in-Furness yard, but as luck would have it, the Weir Group also has a Defence Submarine Systems branch which works on BAE's submarine contracts.

Another big name, former chief of defence staff Lord Boyce, has backed Trident while warning against any resulting cuts to the armed forces. Lord Boyce argued for Trident replacement in the Lords earlier this year, and went on the Today programme to back "a capability we shouldn't be giving up" in a "world of uncertainty". Renewal opponents, he said, "don't know what they are talking about".

Lord Boyce certainly does. He is now a director of shipbuilding firm the VT Group, which already has a PFI deal to train naval submarine crew and is a potential bidder for some Trident work, possibly with BAE. Lord Boyce is also a director of all-purpose military systems firm WS Atkins, which has bid to run British nuclear weapons development in the past. Strangely, he omitted to mention either interest during the Lords debate, nor indeed during his rant on Radio 4.

GMC

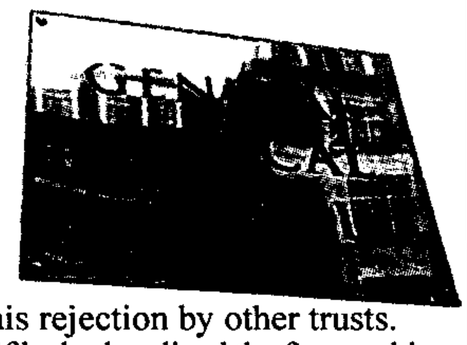
Heavy-handed punishment

WHEN Dr Mo Issa agreed to take part in a peaceful protest over the loss of innocent life in Lebanon last summer, he never thought that it could threaten his career in paediatrics.

The Palestinian-born registrar, who has worked in the NHS for six years, was issued with a warning by the General Medical Council which stated that "in future you must refrain from criminal activity, which risks bringing the profession into disrepute". The warning stays on his records for five years and is passed to any prospective employer. And as one of many locums now competing for work, he believes it already hampers his chances of securing work.

The "criminal activity" in question was, with other peace activists, to daub hand prints in red paint on the National Museum in Cardiff at the height of the Israel-Lebanon war last August. The aim was to create an image that conveys the horror of innocent Lebanese killed or injured in the fighting. The paint was water soluble and demonstrators were in the process of washing it off when they were arrested by the very police officers who had watched them paint it on and take photographs a short while before.

After 10 hours in Cardiff police station, Dr Issa, 35, was persuaded to plead guilty to criminal damage over residual staining on the porous stone, in return for a police caution. He had been assured by the duty solicitor that this would go no further than police records and would not impact on his medical work. However, the GMC was notified by police and after a five-month investigation decided on a warning. While this had no impact on hospital trusts which already know him by reputation, he believes it has led to his rejection by other trusts.



Dr Issa says that if he had realised the far-reaching consequences of a police caution he would never have consented, and would have challenged any charges in court. He says his actions have done nothing to harm patients or undermine their trust. But his plea to the GMC to have the warning lifted failed last week. Instead, the regulatory body amended it to say that when protesting about political causes he must refrain from criminal activity, which risks bringing the profession into disrepute. But since when did protesting at needless loss of life bring doctors into disrepute?

HEALTH SPECIAL

IT

The Hunt balls-up

THE health minister responsible for the NHS's disastrous National Programme for IT, Lord Hunt, finally showed his face at a Healthcare Computing conference in Harrogate last week. Hunt recently resumed the brief after a four-year absence and somewhat unconvincingly declared "it is good to come back and see how it has progressed".

His theme was precisely what the National Programme – under Connecting for Health (CfH) boss Richard Granger – has done its best to destroy: "local ownership". NHS chief executive David Nicholson has been dispatched from Whitehall to get "buy-in" from hundreds of acute hospitals. This won't be easy as many have seen the havoc wreaked on the few hospitals to have signed up to electronic record systems from suppliers BT, CSC and Fujitsu (see System Failure, *Eye* 1179). They'll also have learnt from a recent Public Accounts Committee report that fourteen trusts have gone cap in hand to the Department of Health to cover costs from delays in implementing their systems.

A key element of Nicholson's strategy is therefore to allow alternative suppliers to take over from the current lot who aren't proving up to the job – a move CfH described as "business as usual". Really?

Just a few weeks before, the same CfH agency told the *Eye* that "NHS trusts were directed by the Secretary of State in 2003 to use the contracts under the National Programme for IT since these had been shown to demonstrate best value for money. There would need to be exceptional circumstances for an individual trust to be able to procure better value than the aggregated requirements of the whole NHS." Now that there are exceptional circumstances, viz. the project going down the tubes, new suppliers are being brought in.

Not that CfH will admit the error of its ways. "Getting better value from IT suppliers is what we do – it is business as usual," a spokeswoman explained. "It would be unusual if an organisation of the NHS's scale did not undertake periodic wide-ranging procurements to take advantage of new requirements and technologies." Indeed it would – so why did Granger carve up the country into five ten-year monopolies in the first place?

● MEANWHILE US computer giant CSC, supplier to 60 percent of the country under the national IT programme is, like BT, taking on senior NHS staff to persuade trusts and GPs to buy its systems. But as well as the standard cushy number for ex-chief executives turning to IT companies – in this case former Cumbria and Lancashire Strategic Health Authority boss Pearse Butler – CSC is going a step further by employing one senior health official while he still works for the NHS.

Rajan Madhok, reports *Computerworld* magazine, will become CSC's clinical director whilst remaining medical director of Manchester Primary Care Trust, in which position he will have a significant say in buying IT systems from … CSC. The company insists there's no conflict of interest as he "is not working in a commercial role at CSC, he is working in a partnership/engagement role, engaging with health professionals on the National Programme for IT". So that's alright then.

OUT-OF-HOURS GPS

Counting the cost

PATIENTS in Cornwall are getting increasingly sick of the county's shoddy privately run out-of-hours GP service.

Serco's Kernow Urgent Care Service (KUCS) has been in charge for the past year, but has consistently failed to meet targets despite shipping doctors in from Eastern Europe because not enough local GPs would work for them. Serco replaced the not-for-profit GPs' co-operative KernowDoc last April, after bidding to run the service for £7.5m – £2.5m less than KernowDoc. The local patients' forum and the paramedics' union have called for the job to be handed over to the South Western Ambulance Trust, which already runs an effective service in Dorset and Somerset.

In a recent parliamentary debate, Truro and St Austell MP Matthew Taylor said it was clear that KUCS was "unfit for purpose". At one point in December it was failing to answer one in five of all the calls it received. The *Western Morning News* reported last November that only five out of 49 monthly targets had been met in the seven months KUCS had been in charge. Dozens of patients have reported horror stories of having to wait hours for urgent treatment or doctors making serious errors.

"I do not recall receiving a complaint about KernowDoc for years," said Taylor, "but now [KUCS] is a major part of my casework." The MP said that at a meeting in February, Serco had admitted to problems but said it saw them as part of a learning curve. Taylor asked health minister Andy Burnham whether it was "remotely defensible that the government's drive to use the private sector in the NHS should subject patients to, and put them at risk from, such an appalling learning curve".

In reply, Burnham said the service provided by KernowDoc had been put out to tender because the Cornwall Primary Care Trust, er, "could not be sure that the service gave good value for money to the people of the county".

They know now, of course. A not-for-profit service run by doctors willing to put in extra hours to help patients is – shockingly – better for patients than a cut-price service with agency staff.

The contract has another two years to run, but the Cornwall Primary Care Trust has announced that it is reviewing the situation, telling the *Eye* that terminating the contract would be considered as "a last resort".

BOARD GAMES

Jobs for the boys

THE Royal Cornwall trust thinks it has found a cure for its not insubstantial financial woes.

The trust has a £31m deficit, and was only dissuaded from making hundreds of staff redundant by strike threats. Hospital managers have now decided the way out of the mess is to create a new £90,000 post of "marketing director", reporting directly to the trust's chief executive.

The Royal Cornwall has a new chief executive, John Watkinson, who recently left his job as head of the Bromley Hospitals trust. Coincidentally, the newly appointed marketing director, Ian Burroughs, was previously marketing director of … the Bromley Hospitals trust, where he reported to one John Watkinson! Both men were executives at the Sherwood Forest Hospitals trust in 2003. The *Eye* asked the Cornwall trust if Burroughs's appointment was a case of jobs for the Bromley boys. The trust insisted it has a "very robust procedure" for appointments and all candidates were treated equally, took tests and had interviews in the same conditions.

But given that there is no shortage of sick people, why would the NHS need a marketing director anyway? *Eye* readers may recall that at Bromley, Watkinson backed a scheme for a new private ward to make extra cash and help pay off a deficit caused by PFI overspending (*Eye* 1120). The job description of the new Royal Cornish marketing director suggests similar strategies may be dreamed up for the West Country: the Cornish executive is expected to help with "diversification of income sources from within the NHS and the private sector" and provide "the drive and capability to help us move towards becoming an entrepreneurial organisation". Just what patients need.

MEDICINE BALLS: VACCINATION, VACCINATION, VACCINATION

HAVE you taken your daughter for a cervical cancer jab yet? I've not been asked for it by any parent, but I know several doctors who have vaccinated their daughters against human papilloma virus types 16 and 18, which cause 70 percent of cervical cancers.

One has vaccinated her sons too, on the back of a *Lancet* editorial that argued all adolescents should be immunised against HPV1. This would prevent men passing on these cancerous strains to unvaccinated women, and the vaccine (Gardasil) has the added bonus of protecting against HPV types 6 and 11 which cause 90 percent of genital warts. Having spent hours in a stuffy clinic trying to freeze them off, this would be a huge bonus all round.

Not everyone agrees. Dr Angela Raffle, a public health specialist who overseas cervical screening in the Bristol area, described the editorial as "disastrous for public health": "Countries with high mortality and no screening can achieve major benefit from vaccination. But rushed implementation in Europe will undermine existing cervical screening – which already averts 80 percent of cervical cancer deaths – and leave women less protected than now."

True, girls who have been vaccinated might not bother to have cervical screening in later life. But the vaccine only protects against 70 percent of cases of cervical cancer and it's not yet clear how long the protection lasts for. So cervical screening would still be needed to check the effectiveness of the vaccine and pick up the 30 percent of cancers that aren't covered. However, screening itself is no picnic – minor smear changes cause considerable anxiety and later stage pre-cancerous changes are unpleasant to treat with significant side effects.

If the vaccine works as well as the manufacturers (Sanofi Pasteur MSD) say it does, the side effects of screening would be greatly reduced, since, as well as protecting against cancer, it should also reduce smear abnormalities at all stages. After the Vioxx scandal, some doctors are reluctant to trust data presented by MSD. But the safety and efficacy information have seen Gardasil get a licence in more than forty countries and it seems unlikely that an "empty shell" vaccine, with no genetic viral material in it, could pose significant risks.

A bigger challenge is convincing the tabloids of the wisdom of vaccinating pre-teen girls and getting the cash-strapped NHS to foot the bill for a national immunisation plan. The immune response to the vaccine is better if it is given at an early age. No one suggests that the rubella jab encourages girls to have sex, but the knowledge that cervical cancer is caused by a sexually transmitted infection has turned HPV vaccination into a red-top "sex jab for school girls".

Immunisation programmes are up and running in the US, Australia and several European countries but New Labour's plan to introduce immunisation for girls in their first year at secondary school looks like missing the boat this September. The decision was supposed to be announced by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation in January, but now seems destined to be delayed until at least June – too late for implementation by the start of the next school year.

This may just be traditional British scepticism, but the record NHS debts don't help and one DoH source has suggested that Gordon Brown wants to make the announcement himself on becoming a "woman-friendly" twinkle-toothed premier. Quite how friendly this would be to girls who miss out on protection for the sake of political expediency is unclear. In the meantime, the vaccine is only available privately (£241.50 for three injections plus labour) or from a brave GP prepared to risk the wrath of their Primary Care Trust.

M.D.

In the Back continues overleaf ➤

INSURANCE

Raid the stakes

THE next big rip-off from the insurance companies looks set to be a raid on "inherited estates" – money put in by policyholders whose policies have matured and which is now surplus.

Current policyholders have suffered notoriously poor returns in recent years and most commentators agree the cash should be theirs. Even the Financial Services Authority recommends a 90/10 distribution between them and the companies' shareholders. But there's a lot of cash at stake, so the firms are looking to wriggle out of it.

Norwich Union, with a spare £3bn knocking around, has decided to buy out the policyholders. As the company doesn't have to distribute the 90 percent until it wants to, it can hold out the threat of never doing so as a bargaining chip. And anything extra the company can get above its (already generous) 10 percent cut goes straight into shareholders' and directors' pockets.

To placate long-suffering policyholders NU has appointed an "independent" advocate to act on its behalf. In comes former gas regulator Claire Spottiswoode on a £250,000 salary, paid by NU and helped by a team seconded from NU, to broker a deal. Ms Spottiswoode's efforts will set the company back £6m all told, but for every extra 1 percent of the booty the company secures, it trousers around £30m. Even the insurance industry can spot that's a decent investment. Opponents, however, question whether there should be a deal at all. Why should policyholders be relinquishing rights to what is theirs anyway?

The last time the trick was tried, by French firm Axa in 1999, the result was what consumer groups called an "organised theft" that led to the financial regulator introducing the 90/10 rule. Now that a decent interval has passed since that rip-off, big insurance firms are lining up to try again. Not far behind NU are Prudential's bosses, eyeing an even juicier £10bn pot, who have just appointed their own "independent" policyholders' representative.

Number crunchings

80% ■Fall in Norwich Union policy-holders' terminal bonuses since 1999

180% ■Increase in pay for Norwich Union chief exec Richard Harvey since 1999

Ed's pet zombie

ECONOMIC Secretary and self-declared City champion Ed Balls made a particularly insensitive choice of host for a speech this month on "financial inclusion": Clive Cowdrey, founder of the so-called "zombie fund" manager Resolution.

The *Eye* reported in 2004 (issue 1120) that insurance companies were off-loading long-standing policyholders, many of whom had been mis-sold their useless pension and endowment policies in the first place, to zombie funds which simply manage policies until they expire and don't sell any new ones. The move, as Resolution once explained, enables the insurance companies to "simplify their business and liberate their brand from any continuing negative perceptions surrounding an historic part of their activities". In plain English, to run away from their murky past.

The main beneficiaries are the managers themselves, who have snaffled up an estimated 13 million policies at bargain prices since Resolution first bought up Royal Sun Alliance's cast-offs. On the back of this business, Cowdrey has made an estimated £100m. Doing not much worse through his Sun Capital group is former pizza magnate Hugh Osmond, who bought up policies from Pearl, NPI and others.

Things aren't going quite so well for the policyholders, who remain tied to managers they didn't choose, and many of whom are now being ripped off for the second time.

So serious is their plight that Labour MP Paul Flynn recently tabled an early day motion condemning the "atrociously poor returns on the £95bn invested in closed zombie funds", and the way "tens of millions of pounds have been milked from them by city financiers, while savers' losses continue and they remain trapped into the funds by swinging [sic] exit charges of up to 20 percent".

Flynn is demanding an investigation by the financial regulator.

Oddly, Balls didn't mention any of this as he buttered up Cowdrey at the "Resolution Foundation", the multimillionaire's none-too-subtle bid for respectability through promoting financial education.

HARASSMENT

Neighbours from Llanelli

ARRESTED three times, detained for 12 hours and prosecuted for assault, retirement to the Welsh hills has proved far from idyllic for English pensioner Trisha Breckman.

Now Welsh police have been called in to perform an investigation on themselves and see whether local officers were guilty of racism in their treatment of Mrs Breckman, 62. For there seems little doubt that Mrs Breckman and her partner Eddie Roberts, 68, are the victims of a campaign of harassment and intimidation by their neighbours, Karen and Andrew Thomas, who have – until now it seems – escaped censure.

It started when the couple discovered that the "farm" next to their new home in Maes y Bont, near Llanelli, was being used for the Thomases' haulage and trucking business. They complained to the local authority and say the harassment started immediately. While their plight has been taken up by ITV Wales's flagship current affairs programme, *Wales this Week*, and now some politicians, they say they remain effective prisoners in their own home.

To get to their cottage, they have to use a short driveway across the Thomases' land. The Thomases put motorway crash barriers down either side and two ugly boarded up gates. The effect is to narrow the drive by five feet. The Thomases also installed two pigs called "Eddie" and "Tricia" in a small pen outside their neighbours' bedroom window. Mrs Thomas would sit by the pigs saying things like, "now, Tricia, don't go poking your nose in where it's not wanted".

All this was captured on video recordings made by Mrs Breckman and Mr Roberts seeking to provide the local authority (and later the police) with evidence they were told was needed to back up their complaints. The Thomases responded by parking a removal lorry alongside the couple's fence and erecting a board outside their bedroom to stop them filming the pigs – although it didn't stop them filming pig shit and muck being thrown on to the windowsill.

Mr Thomas flew a Welsh flag over the couple's drive; told them to get back over the Severn bridge; put chains and locks on the driveway gates; and once attempted to tow away their car. Confrontations reached a peak when Tricia Breckman and Karen Thomas clashed in the drive. Mrs Breckman claimed she was pushed and struck, while Mrs Thomas said she had her hair pulled and was sprayed with hair lacquer. Only Mrs Breckman was detained and charged with common assault – overturned on appeal after Mrs Thomas declined to give evidence. Despite footage of the Thomases' activity, the CPS decided that it was the videoing that amounted to harassment. But how else were the couple to gather the evidence they were told they needed?

But finally the boot is on the other foot. After another altercation, this time between the Thomases and Mr Roberts, the CPS is understood to be recommending a caution for Mr Thomas. This time there were other people involved.

Karen Thomas told the *Eye* the crash barriers were installed as a safety measure; that she could drive a different lorry to the supermarket every day if she wished; and that her husband was entitled to fly a Welsh flag on his land as he was Welsh – but that didn't make him a racist because she herself is English. There were, she warned, two sides to the story and they were the victims. She was not prepared to say more on the phone but said the *Eye* could make an appointment to visit her.

Of course, if Camarthen planning officers had done their job, the dispute might not have spiralled. The board blocking the pensioners' window amounts to a "privacy board", and planners have refused to accept that the farm is being used for the trucking business, despite video evidence, KBHS Ltd, advertises the farm as its address. The latest from Eifion Bowen, head of planning, is that two files remain open. Thus the war continues.

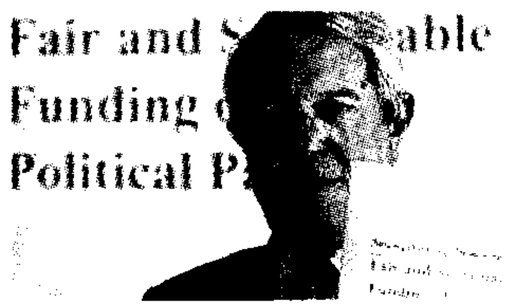
PRIVATE EQUITY

Locusts bite back

TRADE UNIONS have been trying to get Labour to rein in private equity firms claiming they are secretive get-rich-quick merchants and asset strippers. Now the industry may get its revenge, as one of its number is close to persuading Labour to ditch the unions.

Sir Hayden Phillips, a former mandarin appointed by Tony Blair to review party funding (pictured), recommended a £50,000 cap on donations. This would hit union funding for Labour, as they could only make larger donations if they individually balloted the members who provided the funds.

Sir Hayden no doubt generated this idea within his own finely tuned mind, but he certainly has some interesting employers. He sits on the advisory board of the private equity firm Englefield Capital, where, in a demonstration of Labour's links to the industry, former defence secretary George Robertson also has a seat. Englefield's notable investments include GSL, the private prison company that bought out Group 4's custodial business and now runs Yarls Wood and other immigration detention centres, together with other prisons and youth jails. Englefield also funds "Cognita", a chain of "low cost" private schools set up by one-time chief of schools Chris Woodhead.



You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

IN THE WAKE of the Dear Leader's surrender to Saudi pressure by halting the BAE Systems corruption investigation, Britain's failure to successfully prosecute a single case of overseas corruption, despite all the Labour rhetoric, is itself to be investigated by the OECD's anti-bribery committee. The OECD wants to discover what is to blame: legal flaws or enforcement failings.

While the existing corruption law is archaic, there are alternative legal routes so the real reason is a lack of will. The same lack of will is exposed not just by the BAE decision but also by the continued non-appearance of the long-promised new corruption law – once again postponed, probably for at least two years, despite all the anti-corruption conventions which Britain has signed. There have been objections from certain "stakeholders", home secretary John Reid explained this month – code for big business, those who do the bribing.

The government's response to the OECD humiliation is once again to talk up what the Serious Farce Office and the new City Police anti-corruption unit are doing – short of prosecuting anyone. The SFO last year reported that since 2002 it had received 72 allegations of bribery of which 13 were under investigation and a further nine might be investigated. The Treasury has since put up £22m for the SFO to spend over three years investigating several British companies implicated in the Iraq oil-for-food scam – an amount far greater than the £3m-plus in bribes paid and larger than the contracts they bought. The City Police is to be given £3m by the Department for International Development for its new unit, which is looking at five cases and has even made some arrests – involving Costa Rica. But charges? Well, none so far!

It would be amazing if nobody is now charged either in the non-Saudi BAE investigations or those involving Iraq among the companies accused in the United Nations Volcker report almost two years ago. A corruption case is well overdue, so no doubt "you'll do" scapegoats will be found. But probably none with any political clout.

The OECD pressure to shame Britain into walking the walk instead of just talking the talk has been led by the Americans, who, despite the Bush links to big business, have mounted an accelerating drive against overseas corruption. The Justice Department and the Securities & Exchange Commission have brought more cases since 2000 than at any time since the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) was passed in 1977. There have been bigger fines and also jail terms.

One example of the very different US approach – and a reason for Washington's exasperation – is the Vetco International case. Last month the Justice Department forced three subsidiaries of the British oil services group to pay $26m in criminal fines as part of a plea agreement over almost 400 corrupt payments totaling $2.1m, made between 2002 and 2005 to Nigerian Customs officials to ensure preferential treatment. This is the largest fine ever exacted by the Justice Department for breaches of the FCPA.

Vetco had been acquired in 2004 by a group of US, European and British private equity investors which included Candover and 3i, while its directors included Sir Graham Hearne.

The fine was so large because Vetco was a two-time loser. Only in 2004, Vetco Gray UK, then owned by the Swiss group ABB, had pleaded guilty to bribing another set of Nigerian officials and been fined $5.25m. The ABB group paid total criminal fines of $10.5m and civil penalties to the SEC of another $16.4m, including disgorgement of profits, covering bribes also in Kazakhstan and Angola.

"He has an irrational fear of identity theft"

When Vetco Gray UK was acquired by the private equity group the new owners entered into an agreement with the Justice Department promising to detect and deter any future breaches of the FCPA. Despite that agreement, prosecutors said "the corrupt payments… continued unabated from the period prior to the acquisition until at least mid-2005".

Vetco International then blew the whistle on itself, but Vetco Gray UK was still fined $12m. ABB had similarly "come to Jesus" over the previous bribes in 2003, when looking to sell Vetco.

With the Justice Department and the SEC on the warpath, the American investors in Vetco undoubtedly feared the consequences of a US prosecution rather than the SFO. So within two years, overseas corruption by a British company had been punished once again – by American prosecutors.

FCPA was a product of the post-Watergate era, which revealed the extent of political and business corruption by corporate America. More than 350 companies admitted paying bribes or making secret political donations.

However, prosecutions were far from numerous, especially in the Reagan and Bush-the-First eras. There were just 16 criminal prosecutions during the Eighties, mostly of individuals although International Harvester and Goodyear pleaded guilty. During the Nineties there were 14 criminal cases. The biggest fine was on BAE rival Lockheed, a two-time loser which had to pay $22m plus a $3m civil settlement in 1995.

Since 1990 the Justice Department has prosecuted more than 50 companies and individuals for breaches of the FCPA. The SEC has exacted fines in approaching 20 cases and brought administrative proceedings in another 20 plus. Its targets have included IBM, Schering-Plough and Monsanto. Total payments top $140m. The SEC often brings proceedings over the bookkeeping used to hide bribes – the false accounting option which has never been employed in Britain.

But since 1998 the Justice Department has launched at least one new prosecution a year. In 1997 the SEC launched its first enforcement action for eleven years. Since 2000 it has launched at least two cases a year. In 2005 Titan Corporation paid a record total criminal and civil fines of $28.5m. Two executives of American Rice were jailed that year for five and three years. There were more FCPA cases brought in 2004 and 2005 than in the previous 26 years! The Bush administration – unlike the Dear Leader – has backed its words about the evils of corruption with deeds.

In the past six months alone in addition to Vetco there have been plea bargains done by the Norwegian group Statoil (total payment $21m); Schnitzer Steel ($7.7m); El Paso Corporation ($7.7m) and Dow Chemical ($350,000). And more than 20 companies are under investigation.

Evidence of foreign corruption by UK companies has regularly surfaced since the Poulson scandal of the Seventies, but there has been no similar drive to prosecute or bring in more effective laws. British companies have been blacklisted by the World Bank for corrupt practices and accused of corruption by the authorities in Singapore and Lesotho, but, as with Vetco, no action was taken here. Somehow the evidence was never there!

Oh, the SFO did bring one case involving Royal Mint payments to a Gambian bank official. The payments went back to 1992. The investigation began in 2002 and resulted in a Royal Mint executive being charged with theft, not corruption, in 2004. He was acquitted in 2005. Not exactly what American prosecutors now call "real time enforcement".

The American prosecutors have been far more imaginative than British counterparts about bringing corruption cases. They encourage voluntary disclosure with the carrot of a fine and a plea bargain or a fine and no prosecution if the company does not sin again for three years. As then US assistant attorney general Christopher Wray told a 2005 conference: "The days of five year investigations… are increasingly a thing of the past…. We don't have years to build the perfect case in which every defendant and all wrongdoing are compiled into a single mother-of-all-indictments…. We identify distinct cases, which may comprise separate segments of conduct involved in a larger investigation, and bring them as fast as we can."

Something the SFO, with its obsession about "total criminality", all too often seems unwilling or incapable of doing. The Wray policy could have had BAE on the charge sheet for false accounting or deception before Blair and the Saudis had the time to put the fix in.

Such is the US frustration that it is possible

See over ☛

THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE & RIGG

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Number crunchings

£8bn ■ Extra cash announced for NHS in Gordon Brown's budget

£12.4bn ■ cash already wasted on NHS IT programme.

the Americans could decide to take up the BAE/Saudi case. There were payments made in the US, and BAE – like ABB, Statoil and the Italian group Montedison – are listed on Wall Street, which in American eyes gives jurisdiction. Last October assistant attorney general Alice Fisher told a Washington audience in the wake of the Statoil case: "We are working in the context of the OECD convention to ensure the major foreign competitors to US companies are subject to the same stringent rules and the same penalties for violating those rules as US companies…. The Department will not hesitate to enforce the FCPA against foreign-owned companies."

There have already been actions involving Saudi corruption, and as the case against Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev's bagman James Giffen shows, the US, unlike Britain, is prepared to upset its allies in the war on terror. As Christopher Wray pointed out: "These matters are almost always politically sensitive."

THE family of Richard Chang have lost their bid to bring an employment tribunal case against Abbey National over his death in 2004. Chang, an IT risk analyst, fell from the fifth floor at the Abbey headquarters shortly after requesting a break in an interrogation about anonymous letters alleging corruption and cronyism in software contracts. Chang denied being responsible for the letters – which also went to the Fundamentally Supine Authority (who did nothing despite the serious allegations) – when questioned by operatives from Kroll Associates, hired by Abbey. The family disputes a letter that was found after his death admitting responsibility.

The Central London Employment Tribunal ruled earlier this month that claims for unfair dismissal and racial discrimination could not be brought by Chang's co-executor largely because they were out of time – there is normally a three-month time limit. Also Richard Chang's widow had withdrawn an earlier claim following the 2005 inquest verdict that he had committed suicide. The family intends to appeal the tribunal's decision and is gathering backing for an independent inquiry into the circumstances leading up to Richard Chang's death. It has also requested that Scotland Yard reopen its investigation into suggested new evidence.

THE last *Eye* detailed Tesco's involvement in a series of complex but legal tax schemes to avoid Stamp Duty Land Tax while raising finance through the sale and leaseback of its stores.

On budget day, when attention was elsewhere, Tesco announced it had raised a further £570m as a result of establishing a £650m joint venture (with long-time partner British Land) which had acquired 21 Tesco stores. These stores had been transferred last year into the Tesco Aqua limited partnership as part of a tax scheme developed by accountant Philip Shirley. Chancellor Gordon Brown closed that loophole in December 2006. Because the properties were already in the Tesco Aqua partnership, it is likely no SDLT was payable on the British Land deal, so costing the Treasury up to £26m. This could take the amount of SDLT avoided on similar Tesco joint ventures since 2004 to as much as £90m. Something for Gordon to raise with his friend and advisor Tesco chief executive Sir Terry Leahy the next time they meet. Or maybe not!

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 336

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 4 April 2007

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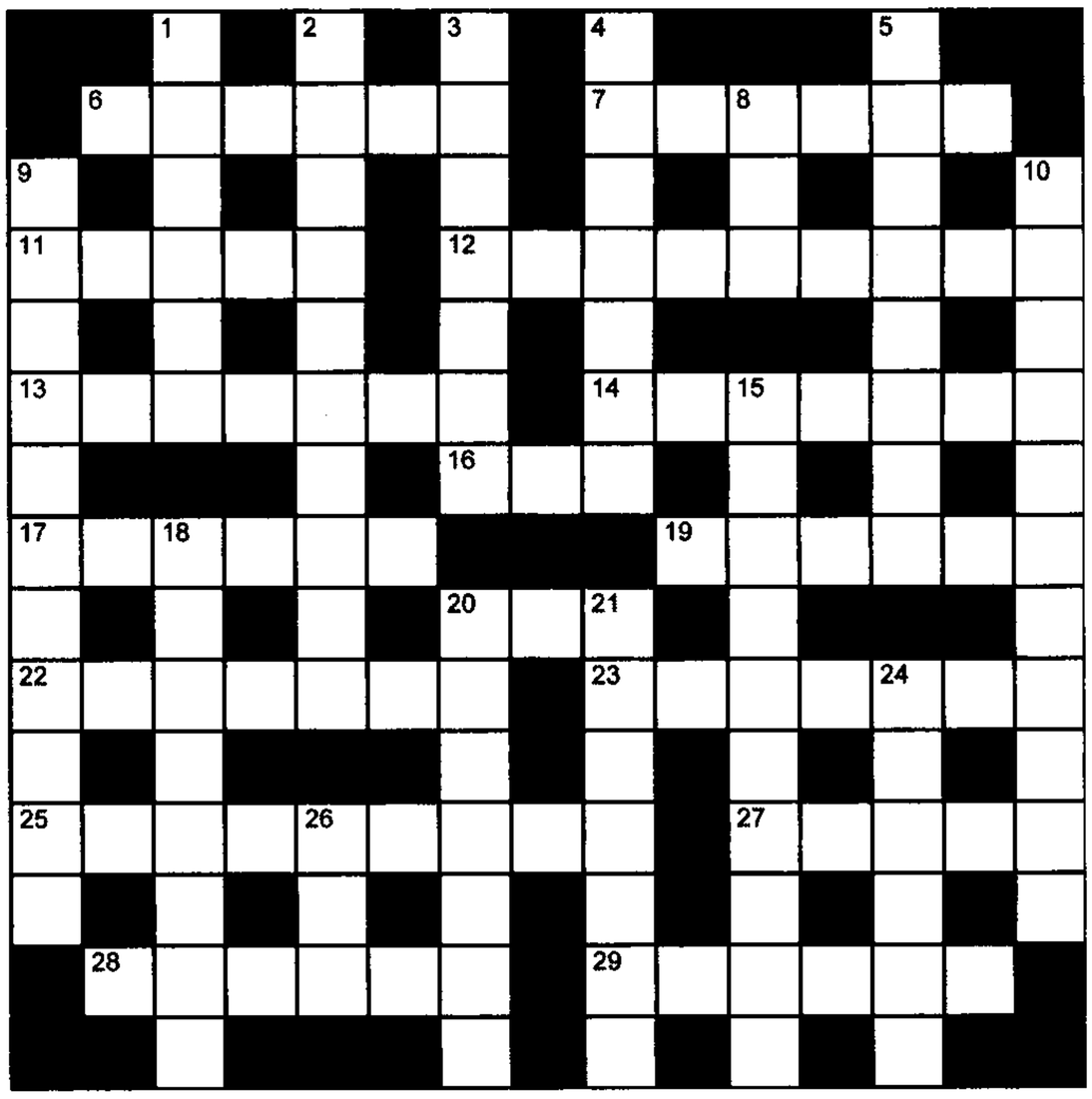


ACROSS

6 Hoover against Bill getting united twice with Monica's top (6)
7 Little St. Edmund's performance assessing body (6)
11/9 Something taken by chance – seized by the publicity-seeking politician (5,11)
12 Dick starts to itch, inevitably leading to tragedy (7,2)
13 Eye's description of drunken sot getting out of post-coital embarrassment (7)
14 Withdraw beer, getting queasy (4,3)
16/20ac. Nice place according to agents involved in Grade's resignation (3,3)
17 Bush type, extremely lacking, developed fever (6)
19 A drag penetrating senior fuel-feeder (6)
20 See 16ac.
22 Getting thing out, that is a bedtime habit (7)
23 Allowed a break from work? Playing? Sod off! (2,5)
25 What blubber makes of hacks around dive (9)
27 Ex-rock group member entertains right plonker (5)
28 Prescott's beginning to pull (cool!) and make a connection (4,2)
29 Cancel entertaining Labour's no. 2, flower! (6)

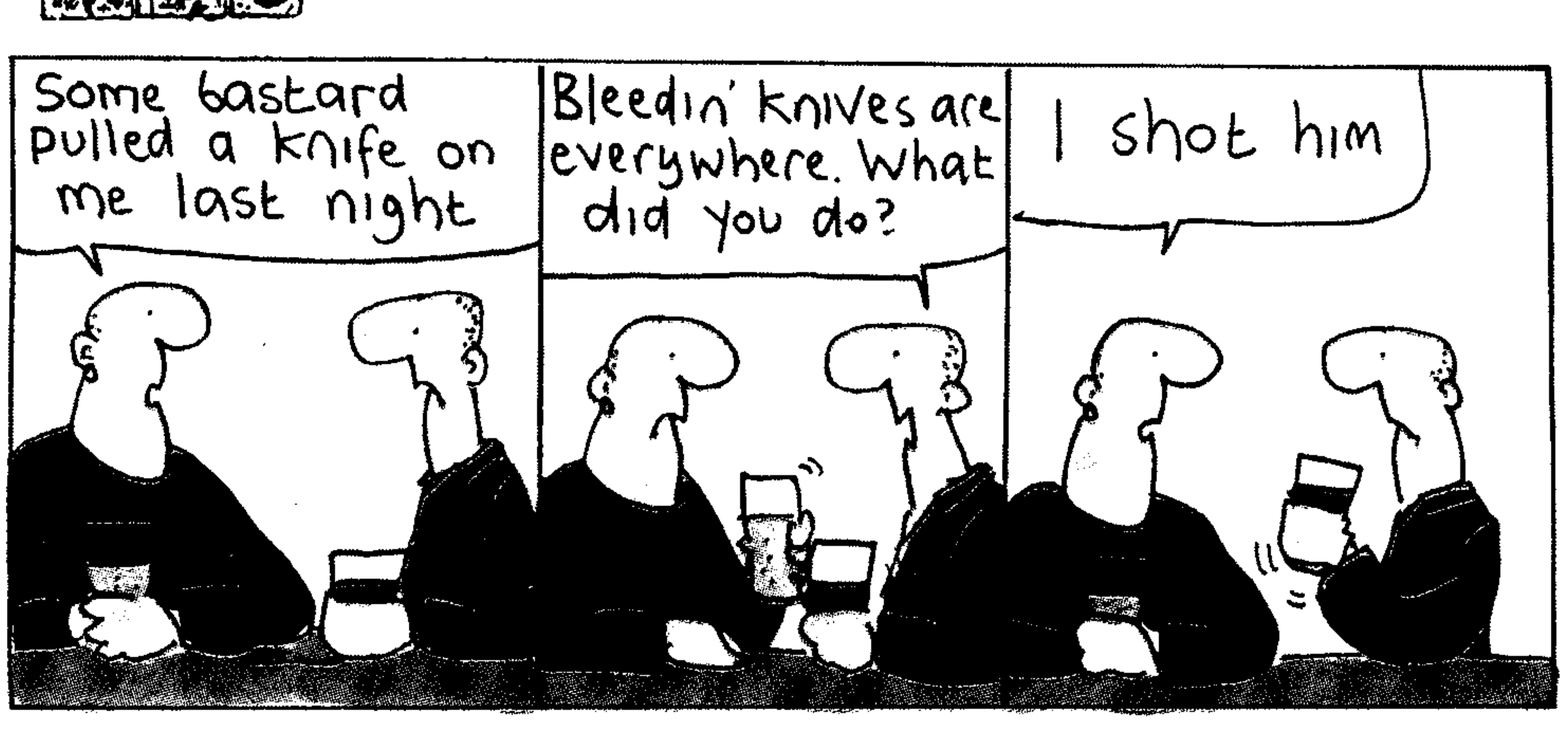
DOWN

1 Clumsy type of prick on Silver, rearing up (6)
2/15 Coming from Brenda's place and going down as payment to suitor? (3,2,5,10)
3 Crap leader about Mail's leader is a gem (7)
4 Penny, surrounded by soldiers, used to remove bits of organs? (7)
5 Hold nut by hair (8)
8/26 A sailor who's experienced a dose screwed good (3,3)
9 See 11ac.
10 In which Bush gets around wrecking of career no.1 (3,5,3)
15 See 2dn.
18 Stupid git dunked in buckets of old Chinese men's hair? (8)
20 Counter-revolution, one of several that did Gore no good (7)
21 By which perverse natural state bastards rule? (4,3)
24 Potential lifesaver when Blair, losing 40% lead, gets sack (6)
26 See 8dn.

Crossword 335 winner: B.L. JONES

ACROSS: 1 Bollocking 6 Egad 9 Cabbage 10 Babylon 12 Eilat 13 Joe Bloggs 14 Teamwork 16 Shifty 19 Bottle 20 Detritus 23 Bishopric 25 Tesco 26 Shake-up 27 In brief 28 Tits 29 Spin doctor.

DOWN: 1 Beckett 2 Libellant 3 Op art 4/18 Knee-jerk reaction 5 Nabbed 7 Gulag 8 Dynasty 11 Belcher 15 Walpole 17 Fetishist 19 Babysit 21 Scoffer 22 Wrap up 24 Spart 25 Taboo.



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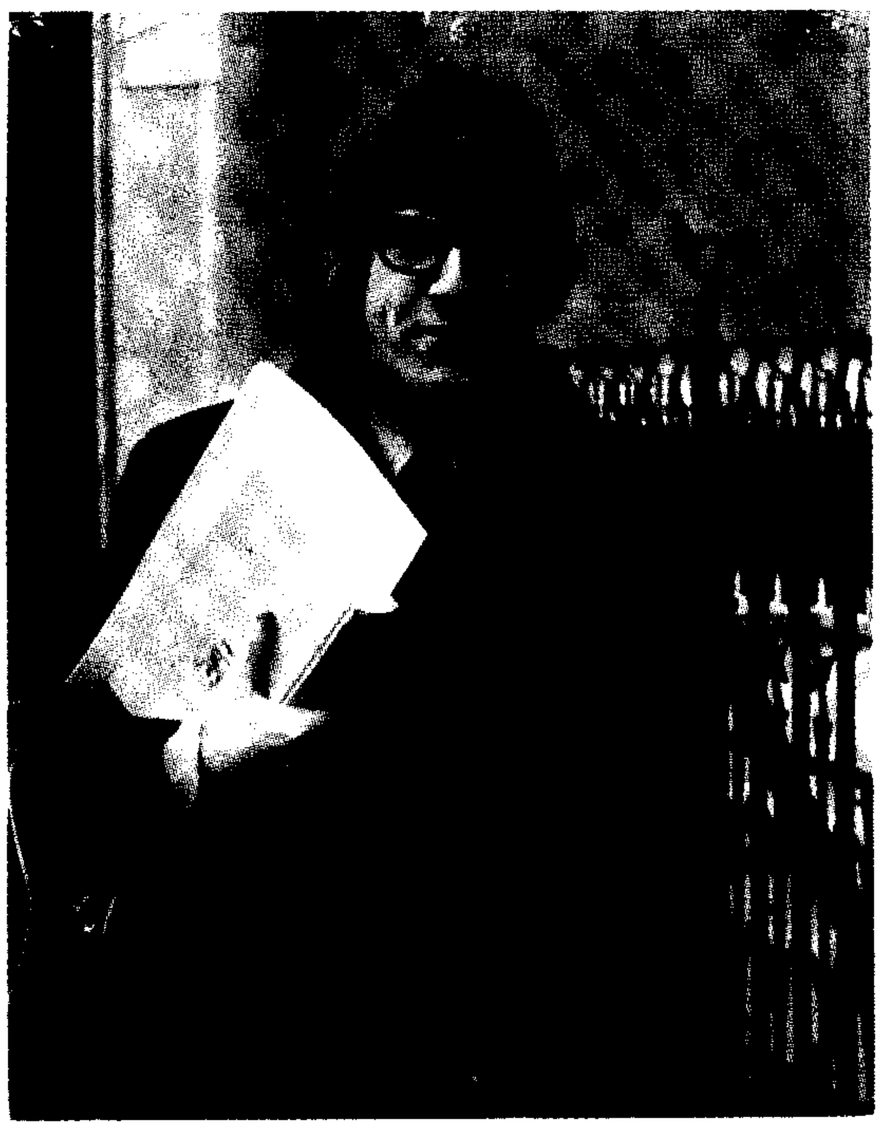

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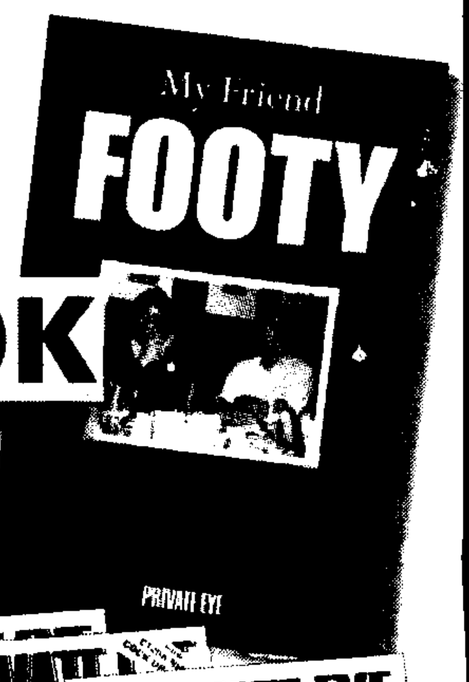

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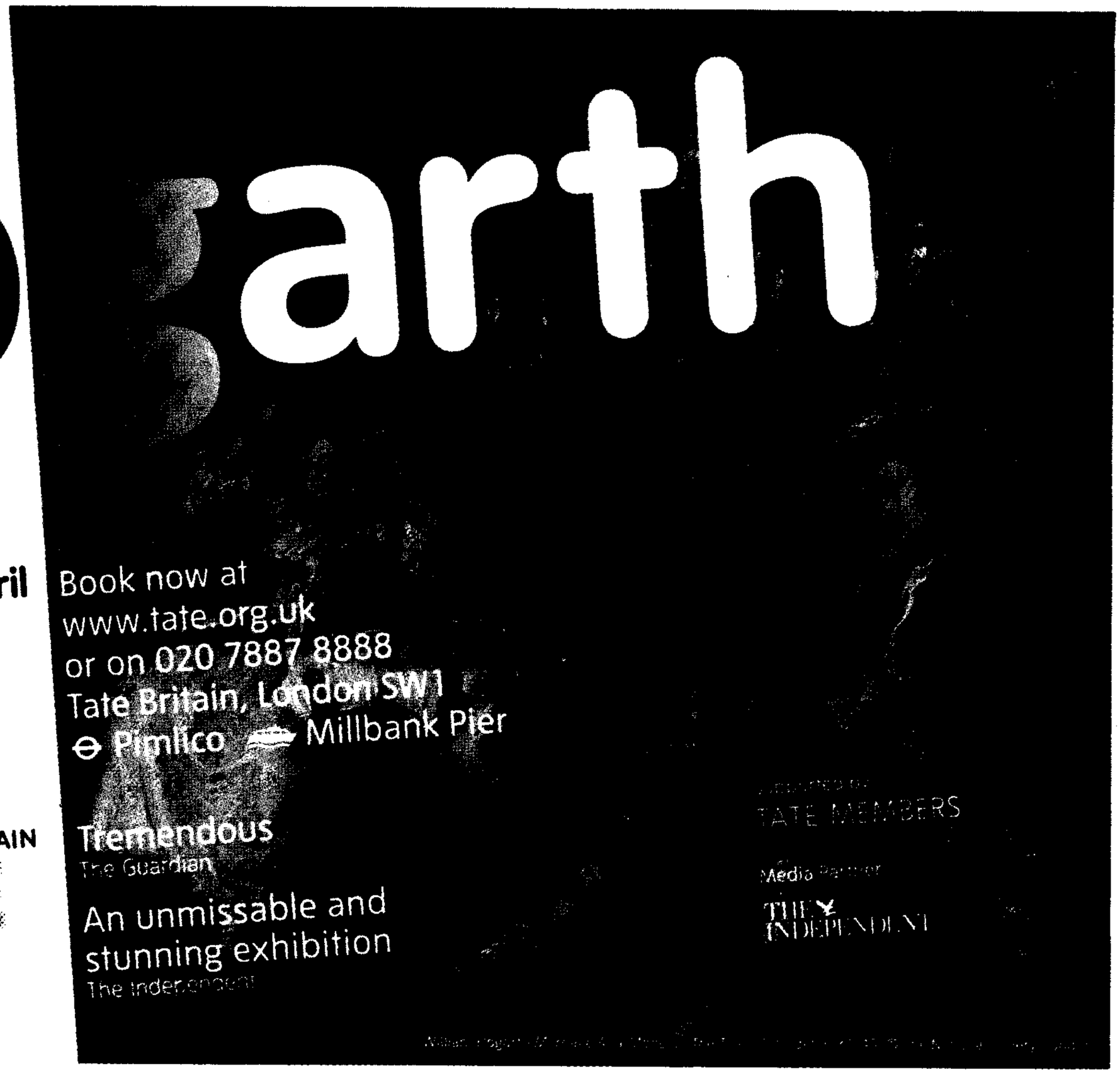

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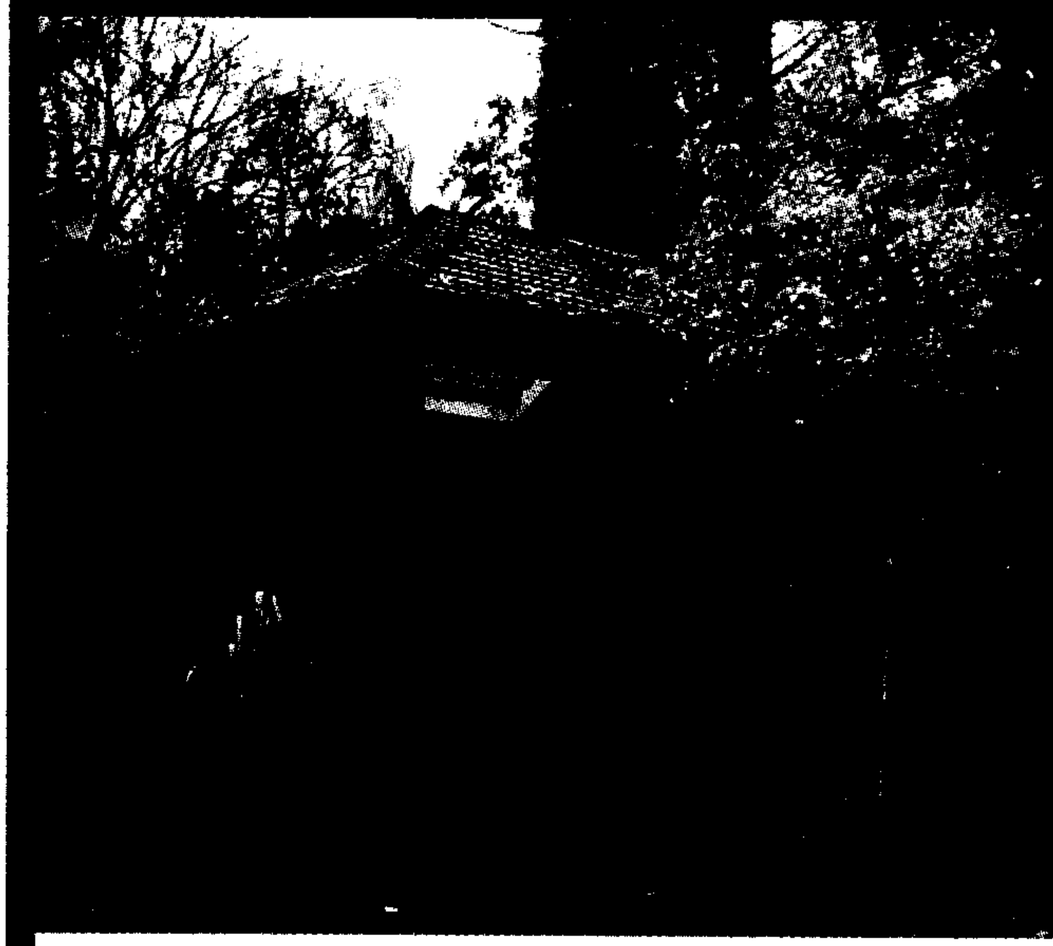

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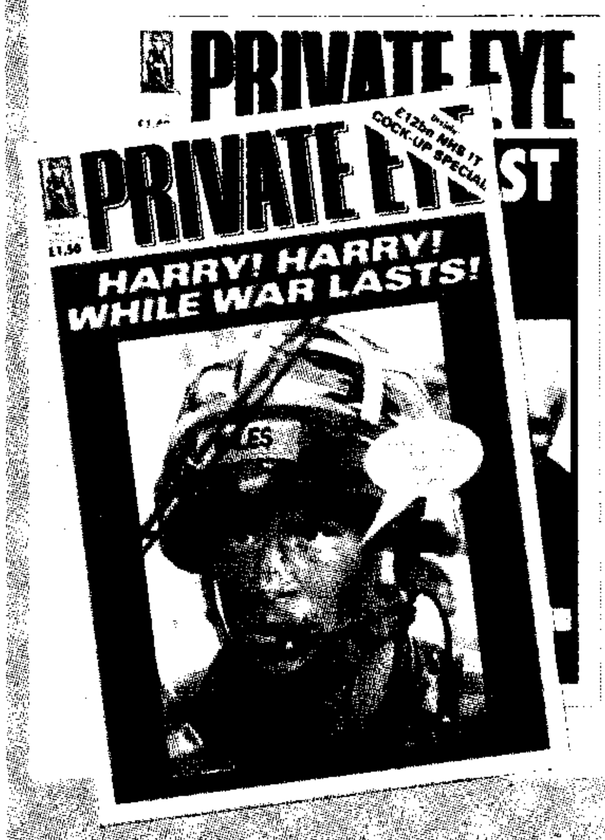

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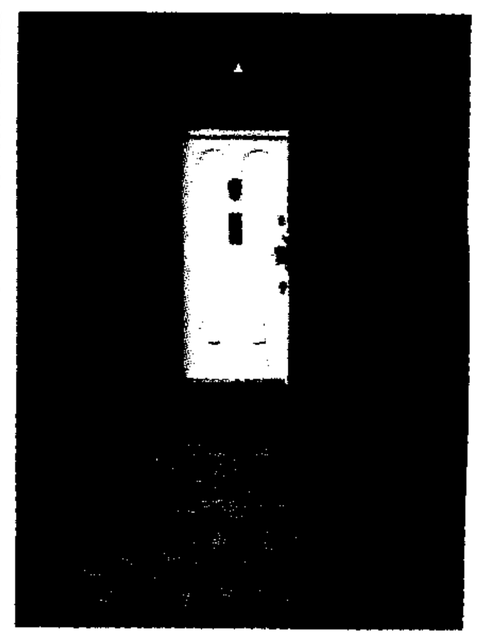

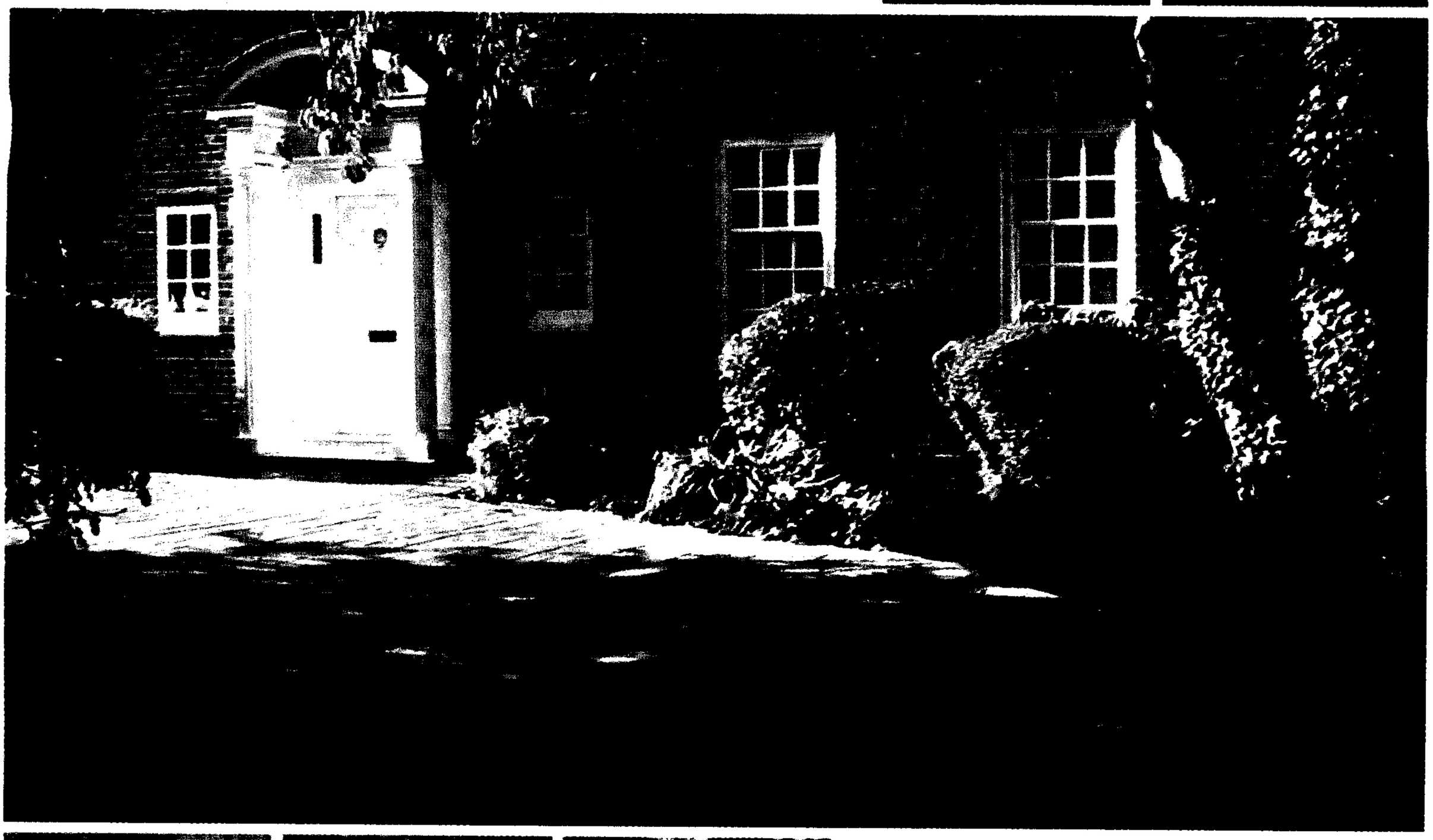

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